



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

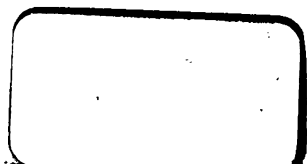
- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



600057792-







# GRACE CLIFFORD

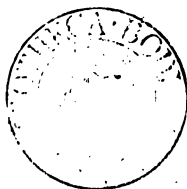
*A Novel*

BY

H. BOUVERIE PIGOTT

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II



LONDON  
JOHN MAXWELL AND COMPANY  
122, FLEET STREET  
M DCCC LXV  
[*All rights reserved*]

250. u. 144.



## CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

---

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. WHAT WAS STUFF TO POLITICS . . . .	1
II. WHY GRACE REFUSED TO STAY AT STED- LEIGH . . . . .	15
III. WHO FOLLOWED GRACE TO MISS HAR- LAND'S . . . . .	40
IV. GRACE CLIFFORD GETS TWO LETTERS . .	60
V. A PROPOSAL . . . . .	81
VI. A BARRISTER'S CHAMBERS . . . . .	107
VII. LADY OSBORNE . . . . .	128
VIII. NEWS IN THE STEDLEIGH STANDARD . .	144
IX. COMING HOME . . . . .	160
X. ARCHIE AND THE ADMIRAL . . . . .	177
XI. ANXIETIES AT STEDLEIGH. A CONFESSION. A SUDDEN JOURNEY . . . . .	182
XII. DRIVEN ON THE ROCKS . . . . .	203
XIII. HARRY AT FREDERICK OSBORNE'S CHAM- BERS . . . . .	227
XIV. FREDERICK OSBORNE AT THE CLIFF . .	247
XV. NEVER AGAIN . . . . .	273
XVI. UNEXPECTED NEWS . . . . .	287





# GRACE CLIFFORD.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### WHAT WAS SNUFF TO POLITICS?

ABOUT a week after this conversation there was a small dinner party at Stedleigh, consisting of the Admiral, Miss Osborne, and Harry, Mr. Reddington, and Grace Clifford.

"Now, Admiral," Mr. Douglas said, as soon as Harry and Archie had followed the ladies to the drawing-room, "fill your glass, and pass the decanter to Reddington."

The Admiral did as he was desired, and the three gentlemen, drawing their chairs all close together at the upper end of the table, prepared to enjoy themselves.

## 2      WHAT WAS SNUFF TO POLITICS?

"I have a bit of news," Mr. Reddington said, beginning to peel an orange, "What do you think, Mr. Douglas, Hamilton is coming back to Stedleigh."

Mr. Douglas was surprised without shewing it.

"The old man, is it?" he asked, laying down his glass.

"Yes, and the young one too. In fact, the whole family are coming."

"Well, so much the better for his tenants. It is time he should live amongst them."

"I think it looks like something, though. They are ripe for a contest, I'll be bound, if Brownlowe drops off. What do you think Admiral?"

"Pooh, my dear fellow, I never think about politics," the Admiral answered, taking out his snuff box, and tapping it on the lid. "This is first rate snuff, Douglas. Will you try some," he said, holding out his box towards his friend, who put in his fingers as usual, raised them to his nose, and then spilt the snuff under the table "Is it not

capital? you try it, Reddington," and he passed on the box. Mr. Reddington, not so wise as his host, put the snuff to his nose in earnest, and began to sneeze violently. "It's pretty strong, you see. Capital snuff—capital snuff," the Admiral observed.

"Faith it is, no doubt of it," Mr. Reddington assented, through the sneezes.

"I remember getting snuff a long time ago in London. Let me see, where is this it was; somewhere in Holborn; no, in Oxford Street I think. It was the best I ever had, I tried to get more, but I had lost the man's card, and never could find the place."

What was snuff to politics? The Admiral's puerile lament for the loss of the snuff-dealer's card was nothing to Mr. Reddington, who had his brain running on an election. Mr. Brownlowe had weathered through, in spite of his wishes. For Reddington, although he would not actually admit it to himself, had more than once thought he would be well out of the way. He wanted an election for more reasons than one. In the first place he would go hand and glove with the

#### 4 WHAT WAS SNUFF TO POLITICS?

liberal candidate, and in the next place, he would have an opportunity of being the chief mover in the contest, except the member himself. He looked forward to the pleasure he should have in proposing this, and ordering that. He delighted in meddling and ferretting about. He was always busying himself, as a workhouse guardian, or a magisterial dictator. He liked to be head and front whenever he could, and as leader for Mr. Douglas, he would have the prominent position, which he wished to hold; but the winter had gone and spring come, and still Brownlowe was forthcoming. But now another notion had got possession of Mr. Reddington; perhaps he would resign thinking to cram Hamilton into his place.

“But we will cram him, we will disappoint him,” he said, “if you will only stand, Mr. Douglas. What is bringing Hamilton home, I want to know, if he is not going to stand for the county, eh, Admiral? What is bringing Hamilton home? I want to know that,” and he faced round to the Admiral, as if he were going to insist on an answer.

"How can I tell you, suppose you ride up there and ask him," Admiral Osborne replied, laughing heartily.

"Or write a note to him," Mr. Douglas suggested, with a smile, nevertheless turning in his mind the very question Mr. Reddington had just put. "What brought Mr. Hamilton home?"

"Come, now, Mr. Douglas, just tell the thing out at once. If there be an election, will you stand?"

"Well perhaps if there were one, I might think of it," Mr. Douglas said; not liking to throw any more cold water on Mr. Reddington, for fear he might throw too much, and send him in search of another candidate. "But it is a very remote contingency."

"If I were you Douglas, I would never trouble myself about it. A man going on to seventy has no business with politics," the Admiral said, tapping his snuff-box again, and presenting it to Mr. Douglas.

"You have a pleasant way of adding to one's age, Admiral?" Mr. Douglas said; for

## 6 WHAT WAS SNUFF TO POLITICS?

the first time declining even the pretence of taking snuff.

"I shall be seventy-one myself, if I live three months longer; I was telling Hensley that, the other day. He is seventy-three, and he is a stouter man than I am."

"What a cross-grained old fellow Hensley is," Mr. Douglas observed. "By-the-bye, Reddington, he is a great friend of Hamilton's."

"Hamilton had a good many friends, that's the worst of it," Mr. Reddington answered. "And I'll tell you another thing; you know Spratt, the little Stedleigh attorney?" Mr. Douglas nodded. "Well; Spratt told me Hamilton is by no means as ill off for money as we thought. He has been quietly nursing his property, and getting rid of the incumbrances since he went to France."

"Time for him to get sense," Mr. Douglas said. "Then, as he is not short of money, I suppose if Mr. Brownlowe dies, or retires, he will fight the election battle."

"Of course he will, and you must fight

against him," Mr. Reddington said eagerly. "They are going to get up their forces, you may depend on it, or Hamilton would never come home. Spratt has the same opinion. You must get Spratt on your side, my friend; he is a clever little dog."

"He is as full of tricks as a monkey. A regular schemer," Admiral Osborne said. "I would have nothing to do with such a fellow."

"He is not a bit worse than the rest of them; and if he is full of tricks, better to have his tricks on our side than against us. We must be content to work with dirty tools, when we can't get clean ones." And Mr. Reddington laughed, across the Admiral, at Mr. Douglas.

"Spratt is my tenant; he would scarcely act against me," Mr. Douglas said.

"My dear friend; Spratt would act against his own father, if somebody paid him for doing it. And as to being your tenant; he would say, his principles made him take an opposite side. Spratt would fall back on his principles, you may depend; and what could

you do. Even, if you had it in your power to serve him out, and did it, all the county journals would be down on you, in a jiffey, and say it was to spite him, on account of the election. If you want a managing man, you can have him too, but secure Spratt."

"Perhaps, you are right," Mr. Douglas answered. "But we can talk of this again; I'll be up at the Grove in a day or two. We have time enough to think about it. Brownlowe's resignation may be like his death; all moonshine."

"Aye, Reddington, you ordered his coffin six months ago, but he objected to fill it," Admiral Osborne said, laughing, and filling his glass.

"Let us follow the Admiral's example, Reddington," Mr. Douglas rejoined, raising the decanter, and filling Mr. Reddington's glass, and his own. "Politics is a dry subject." Then, sipping his wine, he began talking of something else.

"Will you give us a song, Helen?" Marion Douglas was saying, in the drawing-room, about the same time as her father



had changed the conversation in the dining-room. "Let it be one of the pretty Scotch ballads, Archie is so fond of."

"Why not sing yourself, Marion?"

"I am hoarse to-night. Harry and I lost our voices this morning, trying to call you and Archie off the lake," Marion answered, laughing.

"No nonsense Helen," Archie said. "We must have a song. See, the piano lies invitingly open."

Helen laughed, and rose. Harry Osborne came forward to place the piano stool, and help her to get the music. Archie did not stir from his seat next Grace, but began talking to her in a low tone.

When Archie came up from the dining-room, he had found Grace on the sofa, and Marion and Helen standing at a table, idly tossing over the pages of a book of engravings.

"I intend to take you two ladies under my wing to-night," he had said; drawing them from the different ends of the room, where they had placed themselves, and put-

## 10 WHAT WAS SNUFF TO POLITICS?

ting Helen and Grace side by side, while he drew over a chair, and sat himself down, next Grace.

Archie had a wish that the two girls should be friends; and in his simplicity, he thought, all that was required to accomplish his end was, that they should know each other better. As far as Grace was concerned, she would have done her best to make herself agreeable to Helen; both because Archie seemed to wish it, and because she was too good-natured to be rude. But Helen was not disposed to be so complaisant. She had not been in London for two seasons, without learning the way to extinguish such girls as Grace, by a quiet indifference, that without apparent study or intention, is sure to blot them out of the conversation. Helen had no idea of being friends with Grace. She did not like her, and she was certainly afraid of her influence over Archie; therefore, she had determined not to allow her to pass the border land of mere acquaintanceship.

Before five minutes had elapsed, Helen

was talking coolly to Archie, right across Grace, with every appearance of being totally unconscious she was there. She took care to direct the conversation to things that occurred at Inchcauldie during Archie's stay; thus effectually closing Grace out from the subject, as Miss Craig had closed her out once before, although with a very different motive, or rather with no motive at all, except following her habit of giving way to heedless chatter, while Helen's exclusion of her was malice prepense. Matters were at this stage, when Marion's request for a song, released Grace from the position of a passive listener, by sending Helen to the piano, where she stood, tossing over the music, as if in doubt as to what she would select.

"Do help me, Mr. Osborne; say what shall I sing?" she said; appealing with a look of mock difficulty to Harry, who was standing beside her.

"I really don't know, one of Archie's favourites," Harry said, "I suppose it does not matter which."

"Has he so many?" she answered, with her fingers still twirling over the leaves of the music book. "But never mind his favourites, I shall sing one of yours."

Osborne coloured, "Well, sing 'Coming thro' the Rye,' I like that, and so does Douglas; therefore you can please us both."

"'Coming thro' the Rye,' be it then," she said, "although you scarcely deserve it, for you were in one of your intractable moods to-day."

"I assure you I have no intractable moods, Miss Douglas."

"Yes, you have; and if you indulge in them Marion will discard you. She is not satisfied, I can assure you."

"What!" Osborne said quickly, "Do you mean she has been complaining about me to you or, what do you mean?"

"I mean nothing except a jest," Helen answered; "but here is the song," and she handed Osborne the book, to place before her.

Harry took it in silence ; and, then, leaning his elbow on the end of the piano, prepared to listen.

“ That song was for Osborne Helen, the next must be for me,” Archie said, when she ceased singing.

“ To be sure it shall ; but come here and choose it. I never sing for gentlemen who are too lazy to come to the piano.” This clever manoeuvre drawing him away from Grace.

She saw him bend, and ask Grace to come too ; but Grace shook her head, and Archie came over alone. As he approached Helen, Harry moved away from her, and leant over the sofa where Marion sat.

“ When does Miss Douglas leave Stedleigh ?” he asked, after a moment’s silence.

“ I really do not know ; the end of April, probably,” Marion answered, surprised at the question.

“ Does she stay so long as that ?” he said.

“ Why, Harry are you tired of her ?”

#### **14    WHAT WAS SNUFF TO POLITICS?**

Marion asked, looking up with a smile in her lover's face, "or don't you like her?"

Osborne tapped the carpet idly with the top of his boot, but made no reply.

## CHAPTER II.

### WHY GRACE REFUSED TO STAY AT STED- LEIGH.

It had gone round the neighbourhood of Stedleigh that Archie Douglas and Helen, were engaged to be married ; then, that the marriage was to take place in summer ; and that the reason Miss Douglas's wedding, and Harry Osborne's was delayed was, that Mr. Douglas wished his son and daughter to be married the same day.

This was the rumour, and Stedleigh rumours were not always wrong, as we found in the case of Tom Williams and the Hill Farm. Williams was getting on well at Cawton, and

Watkins was getting on well in the old home-  
stead : but still the Stedleigh people had been  
right, that Williams might flourish where he  
liked, but he was not to flourish at the hill ;  
so they might be right too about Helen and  
Archie.

The report had run so high, that Mr.  
Douglas was congratulated on his son's mar-  
riage, and took the congratulations with a  
smile. He did not certainly admit the en-  
gagement, neither did he deny it. The  
report consequently gained ground and  
strength . It reached Mr. Reddington's at the  
Grove, and Miss Craig, who was again at her  
aunt's, heard it from her maid, as she dressed  
to go to a dinner party. Miss Craig was  
not much surprised, and not at all inte-  
rested.

"Dear me, I thought he would have mar-  
ried that pretty girl from the Rectory ; he  
seemed to admire her very much ;" was all  
she said, as she bent her head to let the maid  
fasten the flowers in her hair. She remem-  
bered how uneasily Archie had borne Frede-  
rick Osborne's random jests respecting Grace ;



but by the time the said flowers were fastened in their place, Miss Craig had dismissed the subject from her mind, and was busy twisting her head sideways before the glass, to see how they looked.

The story reached the Rectory of course. Grace met it as women placed like her, with no sure word to rest on, always meet such things. She believed it first, and then tried to disbelieve it, but the disbelief succeeded badly. She had been afraid of Helen Douglas from the moment she learned her existence from Marion, the evening of the dinner party at Stedleigh. She fell back on that now, and fancied it was a presentiment, when it was really nothing more than the fear a girl always has, on seeing the man she loves thrown in the way of other women. She had feared Helen still more when she met her at Stedleigh, and saw how beautiful she was. She had shrunk away, and let her claim Archie's society as her right. Of course, it was all as it should be, he was her cousin, and her lover too. Grace had no business to dispute him with

her, even if she had been so disposed: but Helen Douglas was not a girl with whom Grace would be likely to dispute anything. She felt herself borne down and annihilated in Helen's presence, the more so, because she felt that Helen never thought of her, and let her see she never thought of her. She would look over her, and pass her in the calmest way possible, without once appearing to recollect her presence. She would take Archie away when he was talking to her, and engage him with herself.

Everyone, indeed, seemed to be somewhat neglected in Stedleigh, now that Miss Douglas had come, even Harry Osborne at times forgot his attention to Marion, to walk with Helen. This might be because she was a guest, and a favoured guest at Stedleigh. Yet Grace felt that even for a favoured guest, she would not like to be put aside by her lover. But Grace never had a lover; and, consequently, did not know exactly what she might do.

This was a second thought—Archie never had been her lover—never would be her lover

now. In time, perhaps, she would learn to forget what he might have been, and hold him as her friend only; indeed, as such she now held him: but she did not think she could be friends with his wife.

It is not easy for a woman to love the woman who supplants her. Helen Douglas was never loveable to Grace, and was not likely to become more so if she married Archie. Stedleigh would be closed to her then. Stedleigh had been a pleasant place to her once, but it could be a pleasant place no longer, if she were to meet Mrs. Douglas of the Grange there, so she stayed away from Stedleigh many days. It was better for her not to go. She could not bear to meet Helen just yet she argued, but she never thought how strange her absence seemed, or how plainly Helen interpreted it.

Kind notes of invitation came from Marion, good, gentle Marion, begging her to come over, but in vain. She was so busy she could not go that week, but she would the next. It was the preparation for the children's Easter examination, and she absolutely had

not a moment. To make this true to her own conscience, Grace did really busy herself with the children, and took much of the labour off the teacher's hands, and so the week wore away without her going to Stedleigh. At the commencement of it she had hoped, or rather half hoped, that Archie would miss her, and come to look for her, but the entire week passed without her either seeing or hearing of him. She had seen the Stedleigh carriage pass the school house, on its way through the village, but Archie was not in it. Mrs. Douglas, Marion, Helen and Harry Osborne were there, but not Archie, so the week died without his coming to the Rectory, and her hopes died with it. On Sunday Archie was in the Stedleigh pew, sitting by Helen. Grace took one glance, saw that, and never looked again. After service she hurried out with her sisters. Holding her little brother by the hand, she went as quickly as possible across the church-yard, towards the Rectory. The Stedleigh carriage was standing by the gate as she went out, but that only made her walk more rapidly.

She was just at the gate when a voice close to her called "Grace;" she turned, and Archie Douglas was beside her.

"What a race you have had," he said laughing. "Marion has sent me to bring you home to luncheon. Come back with me, that's a good girl."

"No, no, Archie, not to day," she said, endeavouring to keep the colour down in her face; "I really have not time."

"Nonsense, you have not been at Stedleigh for a week, you must come."

He seemed eager, very eager, but then they had always been such friends, he did not like to see any difference now.

"I cannot indeed to-day."

The ladies were getting into the carriage, Grace had been wavering, but a glimpse of Helen decided her.

"Why did you not come over last week?"

"I was too busy."

"Did you know I was away?" he asked.

It was an audacious question, but Archie was audacious sometimes.

"I did not know you were away."

"Of course I was, or I should have hunted you up to Stedleigh. Will you come now?"

Mr. Douglas's footman came up as he asked the question.

"Miss Douglas wishes to know if Miss Clifford is coming. The ladies are waiting, sir."

"Which Miss Douglas," Grace thought. She turned to see, Helen was waving her handkerchief at Archie, while Marion lay back in the carriage. The action decided Grace's mind, which had wavered again.

"Not to-day, don't ask me to-day," she said.

"When then?" he asked.

"Tuesday."

"Don't forget."

He pressed her hand in his old impressive way, and returned to the carriage, while Grace entered the Rectory.

She had been blaming him so hardly for not coming for her all the week, and he had not been at Stedleigh at all. Where had he

been, or how could he leave Helen Douglas, if she held him as people said she did? How long the time had seemed to her when he was absent in Scotland. Had that week seemed very long to Helen? It had seemed very long to her in her voluntary exclusion from the Stedleigh circle. Had she gone there when Marion wrote to her, she would have known he was away, and so escaped blaming him in the wrong, as she had been doing. She had promised to go there Tuesday, and she would keep her word. Archie would be expecting her and would be glad to see her; there was great comfort in that last clause, and she eat her dinner in more contentment than she had done since she heard the story of his engagement.

Tuesday morning came clear and fine. In the afternoon Grace set out for Stedleigh. She had taken some pains to make herself nice for the visit, she had gone down to Stedleigh village the evening before, and purchased new flowers for her bonnet, as those she had looked dull, so that she might appear fresh and well in Archie's eyes. She

was beginning to have a still stronger doubt of the engagement, and she went forth hopefully, with much feminine faith in the new flowers. The birds were singing through the trees in Stedleigh as she went over the lawn, for she slanted from the direct path, and went along towards the lake; Marion and Archie were often down about the lake before luncheon, perhaps she might chance upon them there. There was the boat-house, and a boat pushing towards it, a lady sitting in the prow, and a gentleman rowing, only the two in the boat, and those two Archie, and Helen Douglas. Grace half stopped, and then went on more slowly. Archie's back was to her, as he was pulling towards the land. She heard him laugh, his laugh came across the water mixed with his cousin's. As it reached her, Miss Douglas raised her handkerchief, and made a pretended slap at him. Archie pulled in his oar, and when she repeated the slap, he caught the end of the handkerchief. They were very near the shore by this time, and Grace who had still been walking on, was close to them. Helen



looked at her, or rather through her without bowing, Archie still held the handkerchief with his back to her, and did not see her at all. Miss Douglas never looked near her again. It was all over in a moment, the laugh, the snatch at Helen's handkerchief, and her stare through and through Grace, without the slightest motion of recognition. Grace turned away walking up towards the terrace, with a heavy step, determined to see Marion only, and then go back at once to the Rectory.

It was all true about the engagement, she believed every word of it now. What a fool she had been ever to doubt it. Helen was sure of Archie, there was no further question as to that. Yet if Grace had been aware that Miss Douglas did not acknowledge her presence, because she knew Archie had not seen her, but would be certain to do so if she bowed, she might have held a different opinion. As it was she did not know it, and so went on, heart heavy, to the house.

In the drawing-room she found Mrs.

Douglas, Marion, and Harry Osborne. Mrs. Douglas was sitting in the window reading, Marion sat on a sofa at the farther end of the room, with Harry, not sitting by her, but leaning over the end of the sofa on his folded arms. Mrs. Douglas and Marion came over at once to welcome Grace. Harry came too slowly and listlessly, not with his old friendly warmth.

"You are becoming quite a stranger, Grace," Marion said, holding her hand, and drawing her down on the sofa beside her. "What has become of you?"

"I have been very busy."

"The boys think you should not trouble yourself so much with that school," Mrs. Douglas said. "You look very pale child. Did you walk here?"

"Walk? It is too far."

"The school has been too far for you today. You must have a glass of wine."

She rang the bell in spite of a protest from Grace. How kind they were all to her at Strathgyle, except Helen Douglas. She never could like Helen, the little scene on

the lake had made her still more certain of that. When the wine and biscuit came she took off her gloves to take some.

"Come take off your bonnet, you can lay it on the sofa, and we shall go up stairs presently; you must stay here all day," Marion said.

"Indeed I cannot."

"Indeed you must," was Marion's answer, as she put out her hand, and untied Grace's strings. "Now take off your bonnet."

"Not to-day Marion, thank you, I cannot stay to-day."

"Why not? it really seems very odd that you are getting so shy of coming to us of late," Mrs. Douglas said. "I was quite sure you came to spend the day."

So she had, only for that little episode on the lake. Poor Grace, she was in a strait between her friends.

"Do you ask her Harry," Marion said, appealing to her lover.

Harry had thrown himself again in his old lazy attitude on the end of the sofa.

"She would not stay for me, let Archie ask her, when he comes in."

Grace felt the colour fly to her face, in spite of herself.

"I would not stay for Archie," she answered. "It is impossible that I could remain here to-day."

"It is rude to press her Marion, perhaps she has a good reason for refusing. Have you Grace?" Mrs. Douglas asked.

"Papa expects me back to dinner."

"If that be all, I could send a groom with a note."

"Thank you, not to day, there are other reasons, that is only one," and the matter rested.

They sat talking together more than half an hour, Grace had managed to finish her wine, and munch a biscuit. Archie and Miss Douglas had not come in, they would probably not return until lunch hour, and it wanted some time of it yet. Grace was anxious to be away before they came, and at the end of the half hour she rose to leave.

"Let me send the phaeton with you. Wait until Archie comes, and he will drive you over to the rectory, if you must go," Mrs. Douglas said.

Above all things that was what she least desired—a drive with Archie. How pleasant it would have been once, but now she was eager to avoid it.

"I would rather not indeed, I am not in the least tired, I can walk."

"But you looked so pale when you came in," Marion said.

"I am not pale now, am I? I feel quite rested."

"I never knew you so perverse."

"I will see you as far as the lodge, Grace," Harry said, raising himself, with a suppressed yawn, off the end of the sofa.

"Yes do, it will stretch your limbs; I wonder you don't get cramp leaning so long in one place," Mrs. Douglas said.

Marion laughed, Harry only smiled, and smothered another yawn.

"Return by the lake, and bring Archie

and Helen in to luncheon, Harry," she said, as Grace tied her bonnet strings.

"They will hear the bell, and come fast enough," he answered. "Perhaps they are not on the lake at all, but up through the wood somewhere."

"They were on the lake in a boat as I came here, I saw them at a little distance; they did not see me, at least Archie did not," Grace said, pulling on her gloves.

"They will hear the bell the better then, as they are so near," was all Harry said.

Grace shook hands with Mrs. Douglas and Marion, promising to come soon again, and went away. When she got to the door, in place of going down the side of the terrace leading to the lake, she chose the other, and went along under the shadow of the trees. They walked on for a while in silence, Grace's mind full of plans for avoiding Archie Douglas. To give him up, to part from him, and not see him at all, was a hard thing; but it was still harder to stand present as she had stood that morning, and see him with Helen, as she had seen

him on the lake. That, and such as that, was more than she could bear; therefore she was resolved to come as little as might be to Stedleigh. She would go somewhere out of the way. She could go to Miss Harland for a week, Miss Harland lived at Cranston, and the Stedleigh people would not be likely to follow and disturb her there. The week would be something gained, something of pain saved at all events.

Harry was walking by her, with his thoughts full of a very different matter, so full indeed, that he was awhile before he observed Grace's silence, and when he did, he thought the fault was his own.

"I think I am a very stupid companion Grace, but this place makes one stupid. I am tired of it."

There was a tone of impatience in his voice, and he switched the grass with a slight cane he carried. Grace looked up in surprise.

"Not Stedleigh, surely. You are not tired of Stedleigh," she said.

"No, it's not Stedleigh I am tired of,

I believe it is myself. I don't know how it is, but I feel confoundedly dull."

"You used never to be dull, Harry; I don't think you have ever been the same since you went to Scotland."

Harry felt the colour rise in his face. He knew how true Grace's remark was, and he knew also what she did not, the reason. He switched the grass again, and dropped silent. After a while Grace said—

"I have had a letter from Tom from Ballaret; he has been very successful, and is putting money in the Melbourne Bank."

"He is a lucky fellow. It must be a stirring life, that gold digging, I should not mind being out there myself."

"Such a notion, you would not like it if you tried, Harry. Tom has had a hard time of it, poor fellow."

"That is according to women's notions; men look differently on these things. What would you say if I ran away and joined him?"

He spoke half jestingly, half seriously. Grace laughed.



"What would Marion Douglas say?" she asked.

Harry made no answer, but switched the grass again.

"What are you doing with your boat? you don't use her much now," Grace observed, going away from that subject as she had from the last.

"I don't care about it much; I was thinking of selling it, and buying a yacht in its place, and going up the Mediterranean."

"After your marriage with Marion."

He hesitated, and then said, "Of course."

By this time they had reached the gate of the park, and Harry opened the small iron one, at the side of the great gates, to let Grace pass through.

"Then you are really tired of Stedleigh, I see," she said, holding out her hand, as they were to part there.

"Stedleigh as it was, I used to like, but Stedleigh as it is, is a different place."

"Why? Is it because Miss Douglas is

here? Don't you like her? I thought you did?"

He leant against the iron frame work of the gate, looking not at Grace, but out on the road, as he asked—

"Why did you think I liked her?"

"Because you were so attentive to her, in fact—" she stopped.

"Go on Grace, out with it, in fact, what?"

"In fact, more so than to Marion, sometimes."

"You thought this about me? Now Grace, what did you think about her?"

He was endeavouring to draw out her mind, and he watched for an answer.

"That she took your attentions as if she had a right to them, as if attention was a thing she was accustomed to, that was all."

"Doubtless so she is," he said, again looking out into the road.

Should he tell Grace everything; tell her the whole truth at once. He must speak to some one; he could not let his thoughts eat

him in silence, as they had been eating him all these months. He dare not go to Mrs. Douglas or to Archie, still less to his father or his sister. There was a seat away under the trees, should he bring Grace over to it and tell her? he would be the better of having some one to confide in. They had been old friends those two, and Grace would comfort and advise him now. But what was her advice likely to be? She would tell him to do that which he could not do, go away from Stedleigh, until Helen left it. He would not follow her when she went to London, but he would let her leave him, he would not leave her.

Grace would tell him, too, he was bound to Marion, and must keep his word. He was determined to keep it, he was very strong upon that, nothing should tempt him to break his promise. No, he would say nothing yet; but let things take their course, and drift with the stream. Perhaps he thought that same drifting might bring him a little nearer Helen. So instead of taking Grace into his confidence he bade her good-bye, and walked back towards the house.

He would not go near the lake, he had determined upon that before he left the house; and was still determined upon it when he parted Grace at the gate. He went on quickly trying to whistle instead of thinking, yet thinking all the time through the whistling.

As he got near the terrace, and could see the lake a little way off, he spied a blackbird hopping through the grass. The bird was doing him no harm, but he must needs throw his stick at it. Luckily for the poor blackbird he took a bad aim, the stick flew far beyond it, but of course Harry had to follow the stick, which took him out of the direct line to the house, and right in view of the lake.

The boat was moored to a beech tree, and walking along the grass together towards the house, came Helen Douglas and Archie. Harry was half disposed to turn back, but then it would look so odd. They would be in the house with him in a minute, it did not make much difference; so picking up his stick he went on to meet them.

"Were you coming for us, Mr. Osborne?" Helen asked, as he drew near. "It is just lunch hour."

"Yes, and there goes the bell," Archie said, as the gong sounded, without giving Harry time to answer. "You take Helen in Harry, I must go off and change my boots, as I got them all dirtied in the wet soil below there."

He darted off, leaving Osborne alone with Helen.

"We had a delightful row. Why did you not come down to us, Mr. Osborne?" Helen said.

"I was with Marion all the morning."

"Oh, of course, I really forgot she held you in leash;" and Helen laughed.

"Will you hold me in leash now, and take my arm to help you up the steep?"

"No," she said, with mock gravity, "I am too much offended with you for not coming down to the lake this morning."

"You do not think me worth being offended with," he said, as they reached the terrace steps, and began to ascend.

"Come down with us to-morrow, and the offence shall be wiped out," she answered, as they went up.

"I am not quite sure that I shall be here to-morrow," he replied, hesitatingly; "I have an idea of riding over to Cranston."

He thought it wiser to keep out of the way of that tempting row.

"Oh, very well," was all Helen said; but she had a shrewd guess that he would be found at Stedleigh, in place of Cranston, in the morning.

They were at the top of the terrace steps now; Helen wore a light shawl thrown round her shoulders, it had slipped off coming up the steps, and one corner dragged along the ground, as Marion Douglas's had dragged the autumn evening, on which Mrs. Douglas watched her and Harry from her dressing-room window. She was watching Harry and Helen now from the drawing-room window, as she had watched Marion and him then. Harry put out his hand, caught the shawl, and drew it carefully round Helen's shoulder. Mrs. Douglas remembered how a similar ac-

tion had struck her once before. There was the same carefulness now, to a different woman. She stood looking a moment at Helen's smiling acceptance of Harry's aid, and at Harry himself, as his hand lingered about the folds of the shawl, as if loth to complete its arrangement. Then she turned to Marion, who was quietly folding up her work previous to going into luncheon.

"Archie has come in, and here is Harry and Miss Douglas," she said.

"Indeed! then he went for them after all."

"So it seems," Mrs. Douglas answered, as she went out, followed by her step-daughter.

## CHAPTER III.

WHO FOLLOWED GRACE TO MISS HARLAND'S.

THE day after her visit to Stedleigh, Grace went over to The Cliff to spend it with Miss Osborne, so as to secure herself immunity from her Stedleigh friends. They would think it odd if she should be at home all day, and not go over, but not at all odd, if she could say she had been at The Cliff.

There was no one at home but the Admiral and his daughter. Harry had come down in the morning with the announcement that he wanted his horse, as he meant to go to Cranston, but before breakfast was over he changed



his mind, countermanded the horse, and went off to Stedleigh.

Grace had a walk before dinner along the beech with the Admiral, and after dinner she went out gardening with Miss Osborne. It was a long tedious day, filled with thoughts of Archie and Helen Douglas; and when night came she was glad to find herself at home again. Her father was dining out, and had not returned when she got back; but Jane met her in the hall in all the glory of her best frock.

"I have had such a day, Grace there never was such a day," she cried, springing up to kiss her sister.

"Where have you been? Come in and tell me all about it."

They went into the drawing room, where Jane, with sparkling eyes, began her story.

"I was away at Cranston with Archie Douglas, and then he took me up to Stedleigh. I am only back a few minutes."

Grace was surprised. "At Cranston with Archie Douglas!" she said.

"Yes; he drove down here with the pony

phaeton to bring you back to Stedleigh, you were only just half an hour gone when he came. Was it not provoking?"

"What did he say, when he found I was gone, Jane?" Grace asked, with more anxiety than she ventured to admit to herself.

"He was vexed; and asked me, did you go away on purpose? He said you went off from Stedleigh yesterday, and would not wait till he came in."

Grace's heart beat in spite of herself.

"Well, Jane, what else?" she asked, putting her arm round her sister's waist.

"Oh, that was all; only that when you were not here, he asked me to come to Cranston with him, and then to spend the day at Stedleigh. Papa said I might go."

"What was he doing in Cranston?"

"He went to a jeweller's, to get a bracelet of Miss Douglas's, that had been sent to be mended."

"Which Miss Douglas?" Grace asked; hoping it was Marion.

"Not our Miss Douglas; the other one."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes; for I saw him fasten it on her wrist, in the boat."

"You were in the boat," Grace said, as her hope went down again.

"Oh, yes; and Archie drew in the oar, and spattered my frock all over with drops of water, but it dried up, and did no harm. See;" Jane held out her frock to Grace.

"Yes, dear, I see that it is all right; and I am glad I was not at home, as you had such a pleasant day in consequence."

"Archie is coming for you to-morrow."

"How do you know?"

"He told me; and bid me tell you not to go out, on any account."

Grace shook her head.

"I am going away to Miss Harland's early to-morrow, Jane. Tell him, when he comes, I am sorry to be obliged to miss him; and now, good night."

That message was true. She was very sorry, yet she could not stay. It was almost like running away from him, but she could not help it, she was too cowardly

to stand ; and like all cowards who are afraid to stand, she ran. It was very good of Archie to come looking for her so often ; very good ; especially in the face of her seeming unkindness. He must get tired, and angry, and blame her at last. When it came to that, he would pursue her no more, and she would have peace. That was the time she longed for, or fancied she longed for ; yet the week that Archie had left her alone, was only just closed ; that week in which she had blamed him so hardly, and so wrongly. Poor Grace ; she scarcely knew what she wished, except one thing, and that was, that Helen Douglas had never come to Stedleigh. She was quite clear as to that wish, although she might be in doubt about others.

She was up early in the morning ; had all her preparations made ; and was off before eleven, that she might escape Archie. The day was bright and fine ; the road hard and even ; so that Grace's little basket carriage rolled smoothly along. She had written to Miss Harland to say she was coming, the day before, previous to going to The Cliff,

and found her waiting her arrival. Miss Harland was a good, kind, little old lady, with a thin face, and a hooked nose, on which she always wore spectacles.

She was Grace's godmother, and held out the hope of leaving her something in her will, as a remembrance of the tie. A hope, Mr. Clifford, good worldly man, never lost sight of; and he was well pleased at Grace's visit to her godmother, on this particular occasion, as the old lady had been ailing, and when old ladies begin to ail, it is well for expectant legatees to look sharp after them. Poor man! he was quite unconscious of his daughter's race from Archie Douglas, or Archie's pursuit of her; although his arrival at the Rectory the day before, had surprised him, until Archie mentioned his sister's name, when the half-roused wonder went to sleep again. Had he known half as much as we know, I'll be bound to say, he would be looking sharp after Archie, in place of Miss Harland's legacy; for, in Mr. Clifford's eyes, The Grange was a place by no means to be despised. However, as it was, Grace

departed for Miss Harland's, with her father's full approval, and was duly received, with open arms, by the kind old lady, who sat in her easy chair all day long, hearing news from any one, who was good enough to call in and tell it to her. Therefore, her first cry to Grace was—"Take off your bonnet, my dear, and sit down, and tell me all your news."

Grace did as she was desired, and Miss Harland was soon in possession of whatever innocent gossip, her visitor had at her command. And who can blame Miss Harland for enjoying it? It was not wicked gossip; such evil tales as hurt people, she took no interest in; but she liked little harmless chronicles about her neighbours, that injured no one. What else had the poor lady to interest her? and it would have been a strict methodism indeed, that would deprive her of it.

She was too old, and her sight too weak, for much work or reading; she could only sit the livelong day, knitting thick stockings for the poor, on thick needles, and listening

to the chat of any idle friend, who would spend a spare hour with her, so that Grace's visit was quite a God-send; and the week she was to spend at Cranston, would be marked with a white stone, in Miss Harland's memory.

Grace sat chatting to her godmother, thinking all the while about Archie Douglas. Had he been to the Rectory yet? What would he say when he found her gone, would he be disappointed? Jane said, he had been disappointed yesterday; if so, he would be more disappointed to-day, after that special message to her, to remain at home.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of the servant, with Miss Harland's early dinner. He laid the cloth, and rolled the table over to his mistress, who was unable to go into another room without trouble. Grace declared she felt quite hungry after her drive, and tried to persuade herself to the fact, but somehow it did not do, her dinner was but a poor one. When it was over, and the servant

gone, she busied herself again with Archie. "He had been to the rectory, surely, before then. What would he do?"

What would he do. There was the answer to the question, in the shape of Archie himself, who had driven into Cranston, and audaciously stopped the Stedleigh pony phaeton before Miss Harland's gate. It was bold of Archie, and Grace felt frightened. What would Miss Harland think?

"Who is that, my dear?" that lady said; looking up. "A gentleman, I declare, coming here. It must be some mistake."

Archie had thrown the reins to the servant, and was opening the gate.

"I don't think it's a mistake," Grace said; telling a feeble fib, for she knew it was no mistake, but that her daring friend, when he failed to find her at the Rectory, had come to Miss Harland's. If he had come to The Cliff, yesterday, she could have forgiven him; but to follow her to Cranston—

"Who is it, my dear?" Miss Harland asked; while Grace's thoughts ran riot.



"Young Mr. Douglas of Stedleigh."

Archie's voice was heard in the hall now, asking for Miss Clifford.

"I suppose he has a message from his sister for me," Grace said, finishing her sentence.

Miss Harland peered at her through her spectacles. It was all nothing, seeing this was the young gentleman who was going to marry his cousin; otherwise, it would have looked very strange. But the Stedleigh gossip had reached Cranston, and quieted Miss Harland's suspicions.

The servant threw open the door, and announced, "Mr. Douglas." Archie came in smiling; shook hands with Grace, and was introduced to Miss Harland.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Douglas; I knew your mother long ago," Miss Harland said, as soon as Archie was seated. "You don't remember her of course; she is a long time dead."

"Not my mother; she is not dead."

"Oh, no; I remember, your stepmother."

"No, no," Archie said, with difficulty

keeping a grave face. "My father's first wife."

"Yes, that is it, I begin to forget. Well, at all events, I am glad to see you, Mr. Douglas."

"Thank you, Miss Harland, your kindness excuses my intrusion; but I am the bearer of a message to Miss Clifford."

"From Marion?" Grace asked.

"From Marion of course, and my mother. They are all angry with you, and have sent such a scolding, I would be ashamed to give it before Miss Harland."

Miss Harland thought this meant that there was some particular message from Miss Douglas to her friend, which Archie did not like to deliver before her. There were two weddings impending over Stedleigh, and at such times young ladies are apt to be confidential. So out of pure good nature she said to Grace—

"Get your bonnet, and take Mr. Douglas out to the garden, a little air will do you good."

Grace rose reluctantly and went out, fol-

lowed by Archie, with anything but reluctance.

When they got fairly in the middle of the flower beds, Grace said boldly,

" Archie, what made you dream of coming here?"

" Because I wanted to see you. Why did you run away from the Rectory?"

" I did not run away."

" If you did not run away from the Rectory, you ran away from Stedleigh on Tuesday, and would not wait to see me."

" I did see you."

" Where?"

" On the lake, with Miss Douglas."

" We never saw you then."

" You did not; Miss Douglas did."

She was very foolish to say it; but Helen's rude stare had galled her, and the annoyance was fresh on her yet.

" I think you are mistaken. Perhaps we were too far away; Helen would have told me if she had seen you."

" You were quite close; Miss Douglas looked full at me, but never bowed. You

had your back towards me, and held the end of her handkerchief, I saw you snatch it."

Archie reddened, he remembered it perfectly: but he would as soon Grace had not been a witness to it.

"Then you ran away from Stedleigh because Helen did not bow to you. Now, Grace, was that fair?"

"No indeed I did not. I should not have minded her not bowing, she is not a friend of mine."

"But she is a friend of mine, Grace, and so are you; I wish all my friends to be on good terms with one another. I shall speak to her about it. I am sure she can explain it."

"No, no, I beg of you not; I would not for the world I had mentioned it. Do not bring me into collision with Miss Douglas, I entreat."

"If I promise not to mention it, will you come to Stedleigh without an explanation?" he asked.

"I did not go away from Stedleigh because your cousin cut me; I am only staying

away now, because I must spend this week with my godmother."

They had walked down to the foot of the garden, and were turning back again, Archie stopped suddenly in the walk.

"You and I must understand each other, Grace. There is some reason for your keeping away from Stedleigh, some reason that you do not choose to tell, and which I must know. You say Helen is not the cause. Am I? Have I done anything to offend you?"

She had not said Helen was not the cause, she had only said, her not bowing was not the cause: but since he chose to extend it, she suffered it to stand.

"You never offended me, Archie, never in your life."

Then they walked on again. He wanted her to be friends with him, and friends with his wife too; he did not like to lose her friendship, it was one of old standing. She could not afford to lose his either. But that other friendship which it involved, how could she yield to that?

"I am satisfied now," he said, "and you will promise to come to Stedleigh when you return; but you must not stay a whole week at Miss Harland's."

Grace smiled.

"Miss Harland will say must, to your must not, Archie. But I shall certainly go to Stedleigh the first thing, when I get back."

She felt she must concede this, for that her absenting herself was looking strange already, and would look still more strange if it were continued.

"That is a good girl, and now I don't see but I may as well spend the day here; you can get that old lady to ask me to dinner," said daring Archie.

"It is out of the question, you are not in earnest, we have dined an hour ago."

"Then, I will go over to the hotel and get a chop, and come back to tea."

"I would not for the world, Miss Harland would think it so very odd; and what would they think at Stedleigh? What would Miss Douglas think?"

"Aye, I suppose I had better not. My

father would have me in the hue and cry ; but Miss Douglas's thoughts have nothing to do with my movements."

" Well, since you are not to come back here this week, I shall go to Stedleigh the first thing when I get home," Grace said, without noticing his denial about Helen. " And now, what message from Mrs. Douglas and Marion ?"

Archie laughed. " I have no message at all ; they knew I was going to the Rectory for you of course, and sent strict orders for you to come, but I got no directions to drive on here."

" Oh, Archie, you said you had a message, what am I to say to Miss Harland ?"

" Yes, I forgot. I promised you a scolding. Well, my mother and my sister sent you one to the Rectory ; and as you were not there to receive it, I drove on to Cranston with it, tell her that."

Archie was not afraid of Miss Harland, nor afraid of any one at the moment. He was in a daring, reckless humour, and was ready to say or do anything foolish, and he

would have said something very foolish before he went back to Stedleigh, if Grace's manner had encouraged him ; but Grace was afraid of herself, and afraid of trusting to Archie, as meaning anything beyond friendship. If he were engaged to Helen, he could mean nothing more than friendship, if he were not engaged to her, he might mean nothing more either. Yet she felt, all through their interview, his manner was not that of a friend. Why did he follow her about, if only to offer friendship. Why, if he loved Helen Douglas, did he offer to stay from Stedleigh, and leave her all the day, to spend it with her ? Would she have left him for any one in the wide world ? What if she had exiled herself from Stedleigh, on account of a claim that did not exist : but then again, what if it did ? She did not know what to think. Archie had said things to her then, and things many times before. His words hitherto had brought no fruit ; these might bring no fruit either. If they had been false lights to her once, they might be false lights to her again. It was better for her not to trust to them ; and so



Archie went home without being led to commit a rashness that would only lead to trouble.

All the way to Stedleigh, Archie Douglas was thinking of his stolen interview with Grace. Should he mention it, or should he not. He had better not perhaps; there was no necessity for saying he saw her at Cranston. It might look remarkable, his following her there. He need only say she was gone away from the Rectory before he reached it; and there would be no further questions. No one would ever dream of his having been at Miss Harland's, and it was best to say nothing about it.

There was something like adventure in his chase after Grace, so often baffled but succeeded in at last. She was not angry at his coming, either; on the contrary, she was evidently glad to see him, but she was wise in not letting him stay. If he had stayed, he must have accounted for his absence; now he could get back to Stedleigh before dinner, and so escape all awkward questions.

He never remembered that the servant he took with him, knew where he had been, and would be whispering it through the servants' hall in an hour.

Great people forget little people sometimes ; and Archie certainly forgot the man altogether, or at least forgot that he had a tongue, and could use it too, in a way that Archie might have found by no means desirable ; but he drove on, never thinking of the busy brain behind him, that was working out the riddle of that visit to Cranston, in a very satisfactory way.

It was getting late when he got back, and he dashed up the avenue as fast as the ponies could trot. The dressing bell rang as he got to the house. He met his mother in the hall.

" You did not bring Grace with you ?" she said.

" No ; she was not at the Rectory when I went. She had gone over to Cranston, to spend a week with her godmother."

" I thought you left a message for her last night ?"

"She had promised to go before she got it. But where is Helen and Marion?" he asked, cutting the conversation short.

"Gone up to dress."

"I must go too," he said, running up stairs, with the secret of the Cranston visit still in his own keeping.

## CHAPTER IV.

## GRACE CLIFFORD GETS TWO LETTERS.

Miss Harland was a great talker, but unlike most great talkers, she was not a bad listener, in fact she listened that she might be able to talk again. She could not repeat, if she did not wait to hear.

Her friend, Mrs. Stokes, who called in to let her know how angry the squire at the hall was, when he heard that his last grandchild was a girl instead of a boy, and what he said when the news came to him, knew quite well that Miss Harland would convey the information to the next comer. Grace heard about the squire, of course. Miss

Harland did not think his annoyance unreasonable, it was very worrying to have girls instead of boys. She wished she had been a boy, she might have made her way in the world, instead of sitting in the corner in her old age, knitting stockings. Mr. Clifford was very unfortunate in having so many girls, one would have been a sensible arrangement. A clergyman without a wife needs a daughter, Grace herself therefore would have been enough, but three girls was a great charge to a man who had but little to leave them. Again, when there was property, it was aggravating to have girls. No wonder the squire was angry about that fifth female grandchild of his. "Five girls to get husbands for," and Miss Harland threw up her hands and eyes. Boys could get wives for themselves without their mother's help, often without their mother's approval either; but what a load of anxiety five girls are to a mother.

"See the Stedleigh property now, going to a girl." She had always thought it a pity, but she thought it a far greater pity

now that she had seen Archie, he was so pleasant and so handsome. She wished he would call again while Grace stayed, but she supposed he had no time to spare from his cousin.

There is no one can worry us like our friends. They know all our acquaintances, and if we have a sore spot connected with any of them, they are sure to hit it. Grace's sore spot was Archie's marriage with Helen, and Miss Harland struck it twenty times a day. She had known the Douglasses in the lifetime of the first Mrs. Douglas. She had lived at Stedleigh then, and used to meet them at the Rectory, when Mrs. Clifford was alive. She had known the present Mrs. Douglas a little, just a slight formal visiting, which had dropped entirely since she came to reside at Cranston; but the gossip she heard about the marriage at Stedleigh, and Archie's visit, had revived them in her mind. Grace would have been happier amongst strangers, who knew nothing about the family at Stedleigh. Archie's manner had made her belief in that marriage waver

again; but Miss Harland's acceptance of it as a fact, chilled her back into doubt. She was beating about all the week in uncertainty and blindness, she scarcely knew what to think; Archie would not call again, she had forbidden that, yet she found herself looking out for him. Marion might send him with a message. The week wore away but Marion sent no message. On the Saturday she wrote a note, only a few lines of inquiry after her friend, when would she be back, she must not outstay the week. Neither Archie nor Helen were mentioned. There was not a word of news in it, except that they had had a visit from Miss Craig, who was asking for her. But when the letter was signed, Marion had added a post-script. "There are changes meditated here, and I think we shall soon be quite alone again. We shall want you then more than ever, we *all* miss you." She had dashed the "*all*." Was it a mere feminine habit of scratching lines to make her words more forcible, or did it include Archie? Then the changes, what changes? Helen was going, that must

be it, and she felt glad. She read the letter to Miss Harland.

“Changes, that must mean the wedding, my dear. Perhaps Mr. Douglas may be married first, his sister speaks of being lonely. You may depend he and his wife are going to live in Scotland. It will be a great pull on Mrs. Douglas to part from her son, [she is so fond of him, I hear.”

Grace had never thought of such an interpretation of Marion's letter, but now in her restless state of mind, she not only fancied it not impossible, but after half an hour's debating, saw it exactly as Miss Harland saw it.

She wrote to Jane and to Marion; to the former she said she would go back on Thursday, as she had determined. Miss Harland wanted her to stay longer, but she would not, and she begged Jane to send the little basket phaeton for her, early that day. To Marion she only wrote a few lines, telling her she was well, and glad to get her letter, that she would be home by the following Thursday, and go over to Stedleigh at once.



She hesitated as to whether or not she should ask her what the changes were, to which she alluded in her postscript. If Marion answered her note, she would hear all before Thursday. No need to wait so long to ease her suspense, but if the changes were what Miss Harland thought, surely it would be time enough to hear them when she went back. She held her pen suspended over her letter, while she thought, would she or would she not? but at last she decided that she would not, and signed her name without asking. When the letter had gone she repented, wishing she had said something, but it was too late for regrets. She must wait now, she could not write again, Marion would think it so odd.

Sunday morning Miss Harland's brougham brought her and Grace to Mrs. Crawford's, a widowed friend of Miss Harland's, where they spent the day. Mrs. Crawford's son was the clergyman of a small church in a village, some five miles beyond Cranston. Grace went to church with Miss Crawford and her brother, who left them to find their

way to their seats, while he dived out of sight into the vestry. Mrs. Crawford remained at home with Miss Harland, who had not been to church since her illness. Mr. Crawford read the service and preached, the emolument he received being too trifling to admit of his keeping a curate. They went home after church to dinner, then back to church again, and home to tea. Mr. Crawford was not strong, and he was very tired after the two services, so he leant back in a chair watching Grace, but saying very little, while his sister did her best to entertain her. Mrs. Crawford and Miss Harland talked away at the other side of the room, until it was time to leave.

When they got back to Cranston, the servant said a lady and gentleman had called to see Miss Clifford. The lady was Miss Douglas; the girl did not know the gentleman. How provoking that she should have missed Marion. Was it Archie that was with her?

"What was the gentleman like, Ann?" she asked.

"A fair gentleman, not very tall," the girl said.

That was not Archie, it was Harry Osborne. Well, she would have liked to see Harry. On the table in the drawing-room, she found their cards. On the back of Marion's was written in pencil, "I am greatly disappointed at not seeing you, I drove over to Cranston church on purpose. Archie went with Helen to hear your father."

She threw down the card, and began unfastening her bonnet. He was too busy to come to see me, too much taken up with Helen Douglas. She wished again, that she had asked Marion what the changes at Stedleigh were, she had likely come to tell her. How annoying that she should be out, and such a stupid day as she had had at the Crawford's, it was surely not worth missing Marion for.

Monday came and passed, without her hearing anything more of her Stedleigh friends, but Tuesday afternoon brought a letter from Archie. It certainly was a sur-

prise, and drove her back into the whirlpool of uncertainty.

"Dear Grace," it ran, "Remember you are to be at home on Wednesday, you promised me you would only stay a week; you left the Rectory Thursday, consequently as a week only counts seven days, you must be at the Rectory Wednesday evening. I have a special wish for you not to be later. Do not be angry with me for writing. Let me have a line to say you are coming, and that you are not vexed with me. I shall call at the post office myself for the letters. Ever your affectionate friend, Archie."

Grace read the letter, and read it again. Miss Harland looked up from her knitting.

"Is that a letter from home, my dear?"

"No;" Grace answered, without looking at her friend. She felt that she was coloring, and that Miss Harland was watching her through her spectacles, so she kept staring at the letter, and said, "No."

Miss Harland was inquisitive. Most old ladies are; and she thought she had a right to be curious about her god-daughter's cor-

respondence, or anything else, concerning her. Therefore, not being at all put to rest by Grace's "No;" she enquired was the letter from Stedleigh?

How fortunate she had said from Stedleigh, instead of Miss Douglas; it enabled Grace to say, "Yes;" although not very boldly.

"Any news of the wedding, my dear?" Miss Harland asked, in her laudable pursuit of intelligence.

"Not a word," Grace said, more boldly, as she folded the letter, and put it in her pocket.

Doubtless she cried, mentally, "Oh, for a release from these questions." Have you ever sat still under the torture of them, endeavouring to parry your examiner, when you had little things, that you did not choose to tell, and for which your companion was digging, as hard as ever Tom Clifford dug, at Ballaret.

Grace blessed the relief that came to her now, in the shape of Miss Harland's special friend, Mrs. Stokes, who arrived full of news, about a young girl, who had eloped from her

father's, a comfortable farmer in a neighbouring county, with one of the farm servants. Thanks to the telegraph, they had been stopped at Cranston. A constable was waiting at the train, and the run-away was cut short. All the Cranston people were talking of it; Mrs. Stokes had just heard it at her grocer's; she had been there ordering some things, and the grocer's wife had told her. Mrs. Stokes was half angry with the telegraph, and almost disappointed, the pair had not got fairly off. She had some romance left in her yet, and no daughters of her own; consequently, she could afford to let her sympathies run with the lovers.

Under cover of this gossip, Grace made her escape. She went out to the garden, and walked about. The garden brought Archie back to her mind, more freshly than ever. There was the walk they had paced together, and there the spot where they turned, and where Archie stood, refusing to go a step further, until he knew why she did not come to Stedleigh. She went down to it slowly, and taking out Archie's letter, read it again.

It was very wrong of him to write to her; she felt he had no business to do it; and it was still more wrong of him, to ask her to answer him. Then, again, she thought, as he had written, he might think it strange if she did not reply. She remembered, long ago, when he was going to Scotland, he had asked her to write to him, and she had not done so. He had seen himself it was wrong, and withdrew the request. Then why should he write to her now? and what was his special reason for wishing her home on Wednesday? She was sorry she had written to Jane, fixing Thursday for her return. Jane would think it very odd if she wrote to-night, and ordered the phaeton to come for her to-morrow. Miss Harland would think it odd too, and be displeased; besides she might connect her going, with that Stedleigh letter, and be angry, and suspicious; if she were not told the whole reason. No; Thursday, she had said, and to Thursday she must adhere. She felt tempted to write to Archie, and tell him her difficulty. Should she go in at once, while Miss Harland was

occupied with Mrs. Stokes, write a few lines to Archie; just a word or two, to say, she would not be back before Thursday. She could tell him not to write to her again, on any account; a few sentences would do it, and it would be no great harm. When it was written, she could put on her bonnet, and drop it in the post herself; it would prevent any gossip reaching Miss Harland, through the servants. The next moment her heart failed her. She feared beginning a correspondence which she could not speak of, and that dare not be carried on openly, even if there was a reason for its continuance.

The close of Archie's letter shewed her, that he would call at the post-office for the letters to-morrow himself. That told her at once that no one in Stedleigh knew of his letter to her, and that he intended no one to know of her reply. He would guard against its coming in the post-bag, as her hand-writing was known at The Manor. It had been done probably to assure her, she might answer him in safety; but it com-



pletely defeated his object, by preventing her writing at all. He would call the next day at the post-office, and find no letter from her. He would be disappointed of course, she was sure of that; had he not wished to hear from her, he never would have gone to such trouble, but it would teach him not to write to her again. Yet, I am afraid, she only half hoped he would take the lesson.

Dinner had been over when Archie's letter came; and when Grace went in to tea, she found Mrs. Stokes had consented to stay and spend the evening. And as the two old ladies had a good deal to say, Grace got through without any inconvenient questions, respecting her Stedleigh correspondent.

By eight o'clock next morning, Archie Douglas made his appearance at the post-office. "If there were any letters for Stedleigh, he was going home to breakfast, and he might as well take them." It was not a usual thing for any of the Stedleigh family to call for the letters by the first mail.

There was a delivery again later in the day; if they happened to be in the village, they sometimes took the letters back with them, but the postmistress never remembered one of the family coming for letters in the early morning. However, if it puzzled her a little, there was no solution for it, and she busied herself in getting them, while Archie hummed an air, and looked on. He heard the step of some one coming into the office, and with the step, came a friendly slap on his shoulder, and a friendly voice cried—

“You are early afloat this morning, Archie, my boy?” and Mr. Clifford’s large hand was held out to him.

Archie took it, and felt very foolish. “You are early afloat, yourself, Mr. Clifford,” he said.

“Yes; I am in search of my letters; I have to be fifteen miles from here before eleven, to meet a person on business, and I don’t want to go without my letters.”

Archie would have been very glad if he had been fifteen miles off then. What! if Grace’s letter should be on the top of the

packet, the postmistress was in the act of handing him, right under Mr. Clifford's eye, and Archie well knew that Mr. Clifford's eye missed nothing. Mr. Clifford put forward his face, just as Archie's packet made its appearance.

"Good morning Mrs. Craven," he said, in his ringing, cheerful tones. "Any letters for me to-day?"

Archie had to stand back a step, as Mr. Clifford moved forward, the place was so narrow. The clergyman's ready hand received Archie's letters from Mrs. Craven and passed them on to him. A small lady-like note lay on the top, Archie saw Mr. Clifford's eye drop on it. Was it Grace's? It was not, only a letter to Miss Douglas redirected from Inchcauldrie. There were several other letters and newspapers, Archie did not venture to see whether one from Grace was amongst them, but thrust them into his pocket without examination. Mr. Clifford did the same by his letters, and they left the office together.

"Any particular news stirring?" Mr.

Clifford asked, as they went up the hill.

"None, that I know of. How are they all at the Rectory, and how is Grace? She is still at Cranston I suppose."

Deceitful Archie, he knew well she was still at Cranston.

"Yes, she was to come home to-morrow, but I had a letter from Miss Harland yesterday, she wants her to stay another week. The change is doing her good and she may as well, I think."

"Here's a mess," Archie thought. "She is not to be back to-day; and I am afraid," he added, "Confound Miss Harland." Archie could not see his way out of the wood. If he had only taken Mr. Clifford into his confidence, the road would have been clear at once, but Archie was afraid of his own father, consequently afraid of fathers in general, and would never have thought of trusting Grace's. Had he done so Mr. Clifford would have settled the matter in five minutes. He was not one of those men, who would care much about family opposi-

tion to marriages, provided he was to be the gainer by the match, but Archie not knowing this, went along in a puzzle saying nothing.

"What are you on for to-day up at Stedleigh?"

"Not much, I think; we had a long ride yesterday, and the ladies are tired. They are going to rest to-day, as we are off to-morrow.

"Aye, your father told me about it, you are going up to London. Are you all going?"

"No, only my father, my cousin, and myself."

"Your cousin and yourself, whew. That's right Archie, when is it to be?"

"What?"

"The wedding of course. I tell you what, you ought to be proud of her, she is a downright fine girl, no doubt about it." And Mr. Clifford gave Archie another cordial slap on the shoulder.

"There is to be no wedding at Stedleigh that I know of, except Marion's and as to that—"

"What about it?" Mr. Clifford asked, seeing him stop.

"Why they are so long thinking of it, I don't know what to say, but I believe we are going up about the settlements now. Will you see Grace to-day?"

"Yes, I'll be through Cranston, and call at Miss Harland's.

"Give her my kindest regards then, and tell her I am sorry she was not at home before I left Stedleigh, I should have liked to say goodbye to her."

"All right, I shall give your message."

Mr. Clifford went in at the Rectory gate to get his horse, and Archie went on to Stedleigh. As soon as he turned a corner of the road he took out the letters to examine them. None from Grace, she would not write to him. She might have answered, it was no great harm, and they such old friends. He put the letters back, and walked along thoughtfully. It was out of the question that he could leave home without seeing her. He had sent a message by her father, not intending to go when he sent it. Fate

seemed to be against their meeting, but he would outdo fate in spite of herself. If Mr. Clifford gave Grace his message and told her he was going to London, he might tell too, why he thought he was going, and repeat his absurd idea respecting Helen Douglas. What would Grace say if he did? but what if Grace had heard it already? The report was evidently rife, and might have reached her; if so he had the clue to what kept her from Stedleigh.

He would contrive to get over to Cranston that evening, and speak to her about Helen. He would talk of it openly and contradict it, but he would do nothing more than that. No rash word binding either himself or Grace, if she were willing to be bound, should pass his lips, he would only clear up the story as to Helen, say goodbye, and return to Stedleigh. That his father wished him to marry his cousin he was very sure, but he was very sure too, that he did not wish to marry her himself, and that he would not marry her either.

Archie had a strong drop of the self-willed

Douglas blood in him. He was more eager and excitable than his father. This of course he inherited from his mother, but he could be as determined as his father if need were, and he would not be talked into marrying Helen Douglas. Still he would be wise about Grace, so as to get into no entanglement with her at present.

This was a very sensible resolve, and very well carried out, as such resolves usually are.



## CHAPTER V.

## A PROPOSAL.

ARCHIE got to Stedleigh in time for breakfast, and eat it all the better for having his mind made up. He was at the service of his sister and cousin all the morning, he did not mean to go to Cranston until after luncheon, so as to make sure of Mr. Clifford being gone, before he reached Miss Harland's.

Helen, Marion, Archie, and Harry Osborne, went out through the grounds, when Harry came over from The Cliff. They walked on to the wood, and sat down in a shady place near the lake which ran through it. Marion

had a pocket volume of Tennyson's Poems with her, which Archie read aloud, while Harry threw himself on the grass to listen with closed eyes. But before long Archie got tired of reading, and they began to talk.

"This time to-morrow I shall be far away from quiet Stedleigh," Archie said, as he closed the book, and looked round regretfully.

"That is a touching sentiment," Helen observed, with a laugh at his lacrymose tone.

Harry roused himself from his lazy position, and sat up.

"London is a stirring place," he observed, as if the subject interested him.

"Yes, I wish you and Marion were coming with us," Helen answered.

Marion shook her head. "You would enjoy London more than I would, Helen, I would never be at home there."

"Miss Douglas is like Alexander, she is going in search of fresh conquests. She has taken all the Stedleigh hearts, and is now like the Chiefs of Athole, going forth to

fortune, to fill her fetters," Harry said, with a smile.

"Return him thanks, Helen, for scraping up his Scotch knowledge for your benefit," Archie observed. "He has been reading up the history of some of the old border reivers."

"The Douglasses were reivers too, I am afraid," Marion said; "we cannot boast much of their honesty."

"No, no, Marion, the Douglasses were so honest they were set to watch the border," Helen said, in mock defence.

"Aye, they were like the fox set to watch the goose, who would not let anyone else take her, because he wanted to eat her himself," Harry replied.

They all laughed.

"Not a bad notion Harry," Archie said; "but they have mended their manners now, and only steal hearts."

"Do you mean that as a witty way of accusing us of deer-stealing, Archie?" Helen asked, laughing and rising from her seat. "Come, Mr. Osborne," she continued,

addressing Harry, "you promised me I should have a drink from some wonderful spa in the wood, suppose you bring me to it now."

Osborne rose with alacrity.

"You will take care of Marion, Archie, until we come back," he said.

"Why can't Marion go too? that is a cool way of excluding us," Archie replied.

"Of course Marion can come," Helen assented, not very warmly, "but I thought she was tired, after her ride yesterday."

"I am tired, let it rest so. Archie will stay with me," Marion said.

"You let that girl walk off with Harry in the quietest way imaginable, I wonder at you, Marion," Archie observed, as he watched the two figures saunter away through the trees.

"Come, don't be jealous," Archie, she said, with a smile.

"I am not jealous for myself, I am jealous for you, I don't care a fig about her."

"You really don't, Archie?"

Marion was not sorry to hear it, for she did not care a fig about Helen, either.

"The have got a story about here, that I

am going to marry her, I wish you would contradict it, Marion."

"I don't think papa wishes it contradicted," Marion said, half afraid, "he does not contradict it himself."

"My father has nothing to do with the question. I wish it contradicted; and I'll contradict it to some purpose, too."

"Hush, Archie dear, don't get up in a state about it; you have led every one astray, you know; and you may have led papa astray, too; he likes the match I think, and I believe he likes Helen."

"I had better speak to him at once about it then."

"No, no; let things rest, can't you?"

"Let things rest, Marion? that is your way, but not mine. This confounded business must be put an end to; it has driven Grace Clifford out of Stedleigh."

Marion opened her eyes.

"What has Grace to do with you, Archie?"

"Everything—I would rather have her little finger, than every inch of Helen."

" Archie dear, papa will be so angry ; for goodness sake don't be rash."

" Angry ! of course he will be angry : but I have as good a right to choose a clergyman's daughter as he had."

Here were materials for a flame ready at hand ; Marion dreaded the time when they would begin to burn. She looked at Archie's face, it was his father's face now, with the hard lines drawn round the mouth. Marion was all her mother, quiet and placid, a counsellor of peace.

" You will be wise and cautious, Archie dear ; this is only a fancy, you must give it up."

" You say nothing, Marion ; I have told you, because I cannot keep anything from you ; but let there be no more about it."

He dropped silent, and so did his sister ; she saw he was not in a mood for a discussion.

Meanwhile Harry and Helen had reached the spa. Helen sat down on the brink of the well, while Harry manufactured a cup out of a leaf, and filled it with water. Helen took it in her hand and drank.

"I like the strong iron flavour it has," she said, throwing away the leaf, and searching for her handkerchief to wipe off the water, that had trickled out over her fingers. Harry held out his ; and catching her dripping hand, dried it carefully.

"Thank you, that will do," Helen said withdrawing her hand with a blush ; "now sit down here a moment, and tell me why you won't come to London."

Did she take that walk to the Spa for the purpose of enticing him away from Stedleigh ? probably she did—yet she cared nothing on earth about him—she liked Archie, but she did not care for Osborne. She knew he was engaged to Marion. She knew that in undermining his love for her, she was recklessly destroying her happiness : but she did not like Marion—Marion, whom everybody else liked. She fancied Marion did not care to see her married to Archie ; that she took no pains to bring it about ; that she encouraged, and sought for Grace Clifford, and was throwing her constantly in her brother's way, until Grace herself retired from the field. She was

not uneasy about Grace now, Archie appeared to have forgotten her, she did not know of his visit to Cranston, of his letter to her there, or of his intention to see her before he left Stedleigh. If she had, she would have found some better employment for her time, than bewildering Harry Osborne.

Harry had determined to be very wise and prudent. He would keep his promise to Marion, a promise voluntarily made before he ever saw Helen, a promise too, that he felt sure would never have been regretted if he had not seen her. He had fought the battle with himself a thousand times, and had kept himself free from any treachery of the lip towards Marion, by speaking words to Helen that he ought not to speak: but he could not hold himself free of treachery of the heart. If that had escaped his control, his words should not. So he said, in answer to Miss Douglas's question, that he did not feel disposed to leave Stedleigh.

He deserved some credit for saying this with apparent sincerity, when the touch of Helen's fingers were tingling in his yet.



"Why you are fitting into matrimony before the time, you have given up all your innocent vices, even your boat is discarded," she said with a half smile.

"I need steadying," he answered, trying to parry her remark, which had a sting in it, "and Marion is just the girl to do that. Suppose we go back to them, she and Archie will be wondering what is keeping us."

Helen rose, and they walked away slowly. She said nothing more about the London trip, that one sentence of championship for Marion had closed her lips, and they talked of other things.

When they came up with Archie and Marion, Archie proposed they should go home as he wanted to be in early to luncheon. He had to ride over to say goodbye to Mr. Hensley.

"What on earth has put that in your head, a man whom you never go near?" Harry asked.

"I don't know, I am on the look out for a legacy perhaps. He has a good deal of

money to leave, and I might get a share, now that he has quarrelled with his nephew," Archie answered in a bantering tone, as he dropped into his place beside Helen.

Harry came after them with Marion, talking little but thinking much. There was only one thing to be done, he had come to that conclusion, sitting by Helen at the well. He must marry Marion at once, there must be no more delay, no more seeing of Helen Douglas. He would contrive in some way to prevent her being at the wedding, he felt he could not stand that. He would speak to Archie, and to Mr. Douglas and get them to hurry on the settlements as quickly as might be. When all power of debating or receding was at an end, he would be happier, and with this resolution gathering strength, he went with Marion to the house.

It was two o'clock, Mr. Clifford had transacted his business, got back as far as Crans-ton, and was sitting taking his luncheon with Miss Harland, while she and Grace eat their early dinner. Mr. Clifford had come

round by the Crawford's, he brought Mrs. Crawford's love to Miss Harland, and having given it began talking of the delicacy of her son.

"He has no stamina for the work he has to do," he said looking round with scant pity, from his own strength of frame, on Mr. Crawford's weakness. "That is capital wine Miss Harland."

"It is a choice store I have had for years," she said.

She knew Mr. Clifford liked good wine, and always produced some of this choice store, when he visited her.

"Very good wine," he said, filling his glass afresh. "By the by, about your wish to keep Grace another week, you have my consent."

Grace looked up from her dinner, "I would rather go now and come back again," she said, trying to make a compromise. She thought of Archie, and how he would be expecting to see her to-morrow.

"Nonsense, keep her now you have her Miss Harland. Jane is getting such a good housekeeper, we don't miss her much at

the Rectory," Mr. Clifford said, overruling Grace's decision.

"I must go home to-morrow even if I came back again next day," Grace said desperately, being driven into a corner.

"I'll not trust you my dear," Miss Harland answered with a smile, "Come, Mr. Clifford, take more wine."

Mr. Clifford shook his head. "A third glass before dinner would be too much even for him, lover of wine as he was.

"Do trust me, Miss Harland, I really will come back," Grace pleaded.

"Why are you so urgent to get away, Grace?" Miss Harland asked.

"I promised Miss Douglas in my letter, to call at Stedleigh to-morrow," she answered, going as near the truth as she dare.

"Nonsense, never mind Stedleigh," Mr. Clifford answered. He thought Miss Harland's legacy better worth looking after than the Stedleigh friendship, "I'll see to that. By the way, talking of Stedleigh I have a message for you. Grace looked up eagerly, "I met Archie Douglas at the post office this

morning. He was asking for you and I told him you were not coming home for a week, that I meant you to stay here."

"What did he say?"

"That he was sorry he could not see you before he left Stedleigh. He goes to London by the early train to-morrow."

That was the special reason why he wished her back on Wednesday. She was sorry now she had not written to him, he would not write to her from London, because she had never answered his letter. There was no use going back to the Rectory to-morrow, he would be gone before she reached it, Miss Harland might keep her the whole week if she liked.

"What is he going to London for? Is it to be married?" Miss Harland asked.

"He says not, but I don't know. He told me it was to look after his sister's settlements. He and his father would not be both wanted to do that, so I suppose the father is going about her settlements, and Miss Douglas's too, and Archie goes in attendance on the lady."

"Perhaps it was to say goodbye, and to tell me of his engagement himself, that he wanted to see me," Grace thought.

"As you are here, you had better spend the day," Miss Harland suggested, "Ann will get something nice ready for you at five, that is your usual dinner hour, I believe."

"I could not put you to the trouble, indeed," Mr. Clifford said, pushing back his chair, to shew a determination to go.

"Do stay, now. It is no trouble at all; you shall have a roast fowl, or anything you like. It is no inconvenience, I assure you."

Mr. Clifford shook his head. "It is impossible; I have business to transact this evening, and Jane would be waiting dinner for me," he said, rising. "Some other time, but not to-day."

Roast fowl was Miss Harland's favourite dinner, and she thought it would have an irresistible charm for Mr. Clifford; but he had part of a roast fowl for luncheon already, and had no idea of having a repetition of it,

at five o'clock. He very much preferred the look forward of a nice cut of salmon, roast veal, and choice vegetables, that awaited him at home, to Miss Harland's offer; so he galloped away from the roast fowl, leaving Miss Harland and Grace once more alone.

It was about three o'clock when Mr. Clifford rode out of Cranston; and at about the same hour, Archie Douglas, followed by a groom, trotted his horse through the gates of Stedleigh. Had he gone the direct road to Cranston, he must have infallibly met Mr. Clifford; but Archie was too wise to do that, as a meeting with Mr. Clifford was the last thing he desired; therefore, he made a detour, which added, of course, to the length of the way, but brought him out on the Cranston road, at a point which Mr. Clifford had passed about half an hour before. Here he pulled up his horse, and sent back his groom to Stedleigh, with a message, that he was going to see Mr. Hensley, and might not be back to dinner.

"This is not the road to Mr. Hensley's,

sir?" the man said, thinking Archie had fallen into an extraordinary mistake.

"I know that; but I shall go there presently," he said, as he galloped off.

When the groom got back to Stedleigh, Helen Douglas was on the lawn. Surprised to see him return alone, she crossed the grass, to enquire where he had left his master.

"Where did you leave Mr. Douglas?" she asked.

"He desired me to say, ma'am, he was going to Mr. Hensley's, and that he would not be back to dinner.

Helen turned away disappointed; and the man led his horse round to the stables, where he recounted the fact, which he did not think necessary to tell Miss Douglas, "That Mr. Archie had said he was going to Mr. Hensley's, but that he had left him on the Cranston road, and did not believe he was going there at all."

When the groom had ridden away, Archie went on at a rapid pace to Cranston; put up his horse at the hotel, crossed over to Miss



Harland's, and rang the bell. He was quite cool and collected; he had come to set that story right about his marriage. He did not mean to tell Grace only, he meant to tell Miss Harland too. He wished it to be clearly understood, that there was no tie between him and Helen Douglas, except the tie of blood. It would be time enough to speak to his father again, but he would set matters straight as far as possible, before he left Stedleigh, and as a beginning, he would tell Miss Harland. She was Grace's friend; her impressions would be Grace's impressions; therefore, it was the more necessary, he should stand clear in her eyes.

The servant cut short his thoughts by opening the door. Archie boldly asked for Miss Harland, and Miss Clifford. Miss Harland was engaged with her agent, going over accounts; he had only just come, and she would be busy some time, but Miss Clifford was in the other room.

Who shall say that Archie did not bless the agent and his accounts? He followed the man down the hall, and was shown into a

room, at the back of the one usually occupied by Miss Harland. It looked out on the garden, and there in the window, bending out so far, that she never heard the door open, or Archie come in, leant Grace. She was twining a creeper, that had dropped down, through the stem of another. Archie was close to her before he spoke — “Grace.” She drew in her head, with a start, her face all a glow, — “Oh, Archie!” and she held out her hand.

“I sent a message by your father; did you get it?” he asked, holding the hand she gave him.

“He told me you were going away. Have you come to say good-bye?”

“Yes; when I sent the message, I did not mean to come, but I could not leave without seeing you. Why did you not come back yesterday, to the Rectory? and why did you not answer my letter?”

She drew away her hand, and sat down on the sofa; Archie sitting by her.

“I was going to answer you at first, and then I thought it better not. I had desired

the phaeton to come for me to-morrow, and I could not change it, without making a work about it. If I had written, it would have been to tell you that."

"Then, will you answer the next letter I write you."

"You must never write to me, Archie," she said, shaking her head.

"Dear me, how solemn you look. You are not angry enough with me, to prevent my writing again."

"Then, I shall be very angry the next time."

"No, you will not, when I am away. I am going to London, to-morrow."

"What are you going for?" she asked.

"My father goes to look after Marion's settlements, and I go in the train of him and my cousin. By-the-bye, Grace, I have a special word to say to you, about that cousin."

Grace drew her breath hard. Was the confirmation of all she had heard coming now from Archie's own lips?

"The Stedleigh people have been saying

we are engaged to be married," he went on. "Now, I want particularly to contradict it. I have never thought or dreamt of such a thing; and I don't believe Helen has either."

Grace's cheek grew hot. "I heard it," she said.

"Of course, you did, and you believed it?"

"Sometimes I did; sometimes I did not. Everyone said it, you know, and it is hard to hold out an opinion against every one."

"It is not true, Grace, and never shall be true, I pledge you my word. Helen is the last girl in the world I would think of marrying."

"She is very handsome," Grace answered, trying to keep herself clear of giving a positive opinion about her. "I think your father, wishes the match. Papa says he does."

"If my father wishes it, I do not; there need never be two words about it. I'll not have a woman thrown at my head by her father and mine, whether I like it or not;

besides, I don't believe Helen cares a farthing about me."

Grace laughed; she could laugh now. How silly she had been ever to credit that marriage, and let the report drive her away from Archie.

"Many a one would be proud to have such a handsome girl thrown at their head, as you call it, Archie."

"It is confoundedly annoying to have one's name bandied about in everybody's mouth, all for nothing. I am going up to London now, but when I come back, I'll set it straight."

"Will you be long away?" Grace asked.

"Not long; and when I do come, I hope to find you at the Rectory and Stedleigh, as usual. You must not be running away any more."

"I did not run away."

"Yes, you did, and put me to a great deal of pains to run after you. They don't know where I am to-day; they think I am at Mr. Hensley's."

"Oh, Archie, it is very wrong."

"Nonsense, Grace; you have no right to

be hard on me, for a fault committed for you."

Had Archie been as wise as he meant to be, when he came, he would have taken himself back to Stedleigh, when he made things clear respecting Helen, instead of sitting by Grace; for, unless Miss Harland's agent takes a sudden departure, and that lady sends for her god-daughter, so interrupting the flow of Archie's eloquence, it will end in something rash. But the agent did not go, and Archie talked on.

"Do you think I could go away from Stedleigh without seeing you, or would you have forgiven me if I had?"

"It would not have been your fault; I should have gone home this morning, and then you would have been saved all this trouble."

"It is no trouble; I would have been here oftener, only you forbade it. It was very absurd of you, and I shall never be guided by you again; I could have made myself so agreeable to Miss Harland, if you had allowed me, that I would have had an invitation to dinner three times a week;" and Archie laughed.

"You have a great idea of your pleasing powers," Grace said, joining him in the laugh.

"Well, you must keep me to tea to-night, that's a comfort; prudence has nothing to do with it, they won't expect me at home till eleven or twelve o'clock. Come, confess the truth, are you glad or sorry?"

"Very glad," she answered, earnestly.

He put out his hand and caught hers.

"Don't, Archie, do let go my hand," she said, trying to free it; but Archie only held it more tightly.

"Grace, my own little Grace, listen to me. I came here to-day to tell you about Helen, and about Helen only: but I cannot leave you without saying more, without saying it is not Helen I love, but you."

Grace let her hand lie quiet now, and Archie thus encouraged, put his other arm round her waist, and drew her head down upon his breast. He had never kissed her since they were children running about the Rectory, or the lawn at Stedleigh; now he kissed her again, without resistance or reproof.

"Tell me the truth, Grace, did you run away from Stedleigh because you thought I was going to marry Helen?"

Grace coloured, and said "Yes."

"You foolish goose;" and he kissed the foolish goose again.

Grace was the first to come to her senses.

"Oh, Archie dear," she said, "I should not have let you talk so. What will your father say?"

"He need know nothing of it yet, Grace, or your father either; I shall write to you from London, through Marion, and you must answer me. When I come back I shall brave it out. Don't be frightened, darling, I'll stand between you and every one."

"Hush! Archie."

Grace heard a servant's step across the hall, the door opened, and the man came in to say that tea was ready, and Miss Harland hoped Miss Clifford would keep Mr. Douglas.

Cowardly Grace slipped off to her own room, and sent Archie in alone. Miss Harland was delighted to see him, and Archie, drawing a chair close to her, set about making



himself as agreeable as possible, and was as careless and talkative as if he had not been the principal in a love scene five minutes before. Miss Harland was full of regrets she had not been able to see him sooner, as her agent was with her, and Archie blessed the agent again, although he was vaguely conscious his being there, had caused him to do a very rash thing. Grace came down presently. Archie never looked near her, but kept Miss Harland engaged talking, while Grace poured out the tea.

"Any news in Stedleigh, Mr. Douglas?" Miss Harland asked, as she eat her toasted muffin; "Stedleigh is a great place for news."

"Yes; but the worst of Stedleigh news is, that it is not always true. There is one story they have flying about there, I am particularly anxious to contradict, and that is, that I am going to be married to Miss Douglas. No one would be more surprised or annoyed about it than the lady herself, and I certainly was astonished to hear it."

Miss Harland had got news now of a kind

she least expected, and it gave her something to talk about during Archie's stay.

"Dear me," she said to Grace, when he had gone, "what will Mrs. Stokes say to-morrow? only fancy there being no wedding after all."

"Yes, indeed," Grace answered, hypocritically.

## CHAPTER VI.

## A BARRISTER'S CHAMBERS.

It was hot everywhere. The blazing sun came glaring into a room on the first floor of a house in Chancery Lane, where our old acquaintance, Frederick Osborne, has taken up his quarters.

We have lost sight of Mr. Osborne for some months, but he has by no means lost sight of himself. He had read hard during the winter, passed his examination successfully, and been called to the bar. So that by the time we find leisure to look after him, he is in possession of a wig and gown spick and span new, and has changed

his quarters from the Temple to Chancery Lane. Why nobody knows except himself.

The room into which the sun glared that hot May day, in spite of its drawn blinds, was furnished to suit the taste and habits of its owner. A handsome dark green carpet, relieved by a plentiful scattering of lilies and bright red roses, covered the floor. A circular walnut wood table stood in the centre. And the chairs, which were of walnut wood likewise, were stout in legs and backs, and covered with leather. A reading chair, with a bronze candlestick screwed on one of its arms, was placed at one side of the grate. At the opposite side was another equally comfortable, and exactly like it, except in respect of the light. An American rocking-chair, a billiard table, balls, and cues, a large sideboard, and one or two tables, completed the furniture of the room, which notwithstanding its comfortable garnishing, had a disordered, unsettled look, owing to the number of things that were scattered about it.

It was a regular bachelor's apartment. Pipes of all kinds, and a box of cigars, occupied the mantelpiece. In one corner was to be seen a violin, half thrust into a green baize bag, and beside it a bow with some of the strings broken, which afforded evidence of its being submitted to rather hard usage on some occasion or other. A railway rug rolled tight, and fastened with leather straps at either end, occupied a chair at the farthest part of the room. Near it there was a table, on which lay a confused heap of newspapers, numbers of the Saturday Review, and magazines of all sorts and colours, from the deep yellow of the Cornhill, to the faint shade of the St. James'. Add to these, two or three riding whips, gloves, a cricket bat, an accordeon, and the sideboard spread over with a cloth, on which were laid plates, knives and forks, wine glasses, and decanters, one with wine and one without, a few bottles of Bass's ale, cold meat, cheese, and bread. From this you may have some idea of the heterogeneous mass of things, amongst which two young men were sitting smoking cigars.

In the rocking chair, slowly tilting himself backwards and forwards, was our old friend Archie Douglas; and opposite to him, with his elbow on the table, his cheek leaning against his hand, and his head surmounted by a crimson smoking cap, with a large crimson tassel falling over the side, sat the master of the mansion, Frederick Osborne himself.

There was a rakish, unsettled look about him, in keeping with the rakish, unsettled look of the place. He had the old cynical twinkle in his bright dark eyes, and the old cynical smile lurking round his mouth, about which the smoke of his cigar curled, as it came from his lips in slow puffs.

"Its not a bad den this, Douglas," Osborne said, removing his cigar from his mouth a moment. "What do you think of it?"

"Well, it's better inside than out," Archie answered, with masculine candour.

"This is a very good room, and so is the next," Osborne said, "only for the look out."

He glanced in, through the half open door opposite where he sat. "Come in and have a look at it."

Archie rose and followed his friend into a well furnished bedroom, which had caught the infection of untidyness from the room without. Ivory-backed brushes, combs, perfume bottles, taken from an open dressing-case that was on the table, were mixed up with half soiled kid gloves of various colours; and a lady's bouquet.

"What is this, Osborne?" Archie asked, taking up the flowers.

"Signs of the citadel's weakness, you think, Douglas," Frederick answered, with a laugh, at the same time taking the flowers from his hand, and flinging them out of the window. "There is the view I spoke about. Is it not grand? That's something for a fellow to work up his imagination with, if he wants to write about a gaol."

Truly it was dismal. A little narrow patch of flagged yard, flanked by a high blank wall.

"They could not give worse me than that

in the Queen's Bench, if I got in there for my cigar bill."

Douglas laughed.

"Not much, I daresay. Still I would not advise you to try the experiment."

"None of us will do that if we can help it, Archie."

"Well, I suppose not. But this place does not look like your going to the Queen's Bench," he said, throwing his eye round the coats, waistcoats, and slippers, and a handsome tiger skin rug, that lay upon a chair.

"That's all you know about it, my boy. It's the very men that have all these things that go there first, although I am not going to make one of them. I was down seeing a fellow in the bench last night, and a right pleasant evening we had of it. He will be out in a few days. He is going through the court, if you know what that is."

"Oh yes, I do of course."

"Well he is going through and will give his assets up to his creditors to make what they can of them. A cigar case, a pocket-



knife, a silver headed cane, and a pair of boxing gloves."

: They had come out of the bedroom, and Archie stood at the billiard table knocking the balls about.

"Will you have a game?" Osborne asked coming over to join him, and rolling one of the balls over the table with his hand.

"Not now, I came to have a talk, we'll have billiards another time."

"Just as you like," and Frederick resuming his seat, lit a fresh cigar.

Archie followed his example, and renewed the agreeable occupation of lazily rocking himself to and fro.

"I have been made a barrister at law since you saw me," Osborne said, crossing his legs, "and as such I am promoted into eating oranges, only they are getting bad now."

"Oranges," Douglas answered with a smile, "What the deuce do you mean by that?"

"Come into court some day and I'll shew you. We of the stuff gowns are divided into

three classes. The first are getting up in life and in practice and have a good deal to do. So much indeed that they see a silk gown in perspective, and a very near perspective too; some of them even think themselves aggrieved that such and such a fellow in the inner bar has got it before them. Well, the second class occupy an outer circle, but are tolerably supplied with briefs, while the third and last, to which I have the honor to belong at present, have no briefs at all, and consequently sit whispering together and sucking oranges. It's not either amusing or exciting to sit there for five or six hours every day hearing other men speak, and seeing other men pocket guineas that you want, while you pretend to be satisfied with idleness and oranges."

"I'd pitch the whole thing to the dogs, and try something else," Archie said, not very wisely.

"Pooh, nonsense, has a fellow so many years to live that he can get professions and throw them up in a minute?" Osborne said. "Don't you think the silk gown men who sit

before me and the chancellor himself on the bench have had to eat oranges as I have, for lack of something to do? I'll have patience, and wait for my turn, it will come some time, as it always comes to the man who waits to grasp it."

He had taken his cigar from his lips and with his dark eye fixed on Douglas's face spoke rapidly and eagerly, without a touch of his natural irony breaking through. "The time will come as it always comes to the man who waits to grasp it." And he looked like a man who waited to grasp it and would hold it too when the chance came.

The old Admiral had laughingly said once that Osborne was ambitious, and he was right. Under the careless exterior, and cynical manner of the young barrister lurked a daring ambition that few who knew him dreamt of. He sat in the court peeling his oranges, or idly paring his nails with his penknife, nursing dreams of what he could be if he got the chance, which it is said all men have once in a lifetime, that of catching fortune at flood-tide. This all men have, but some men idly

neglect the opportunity, and the golden hour never comes again.

Osborne believed in the golden hour, and only waited to seize it. Naturally strong in mind and body, he would go through fatigue which few of his companions could bear. Hard study, and hard living, failed to break him down. He had a fine memory in which to store what he read, and a comprehensive mind to understand, and analyse in a moment, what others puzzled over; and after a course of severe reading Osborne would let the reins fall loose awhile, and indulge himself with wine and billiards, cards and dice, or any other amusement that fell in his way. But with all his apparent heedlessness, he kept himself free of debt. He had a good allowance from his father, which he added to, by an occasional contribution to a magazine. He was skilful at cards, and skilful at billiards, so that men did not make much by playing with him, and one way or another he was never out of pocket by his friends.

He burthened himself with no serious

friendships, and no serious love affairs. He floated loose, troubling himself about no one, except himself. He disbelieved in men and women generally, through the not very unnatural mistake of supposing them all more or less like himself, and yet he was no worse than a hundred others, that we jostle every day in the week, and not as bad as many of them.

He would not lie or cheat, or get mad drunk, but he would see his friends lose money without caring whether they did or not. He would bolt a fib if one were needed, and he would drink more wine than was good for him very often, and be as well the next morning as if he had never broached a bottle. Such was the man who sat before Douglas, with his quick brilliant eye fixed on his face, waiting for an answer.

"Osborne, I believe you are right?" Archie said, surprised at his sudden earnestness. "I answered you like a fool."

"No; you answered according to the point my words seemed to lead to, and you are answering now the same way. That is, how

men are led to think according to the notions of those they are with. That is why some men guide while others follow. We will not give ourselves time to let our brains work, so they put us in harness, and drive us where they like."

"Faith, and they would have a troublesome horse that harnessed you," Archie said, laughing.

"It does not do for a fellow to be made of pliable materials, when he has his way to make. It's all very well for you and Harry, that were born with silver spoons in your mouths. But I did not drive into the world with my carriage wheels greased," Osborne said, resuming his cigar.

Archie tossed his cane in the air, and caught it again. He was thinking of Grace Clifford, and how the greasing might rub off his carriage-wheels, when his father came to know what he had done. But Osborne was not just the confidant he would choose to talk to about Grace, unless in stress of weather.

He was very pleasant to come to, to while away an hour, when he got tired of the hotel

where his father had located himself, and tired of York Place, where Helen Douglas was staying with Lady Mackenzie, who was content to live on the border land of gentility, which was the most her jointure would admit of. So Archie thought of the time when the grease might rub off his carriage-wheels; tossed up his cane, and said nothing.

"I think you are getting dull, Archie, my boy?" Osborne said, after a moment. "I don't doubt but the best thing you can do is to have a glass of wine, to kill care."

"Well, I don't mind if I do," Archie answered; who had refused luncheon when he came in, but was getting hungry now.

"Or a bottle of ale and some beef," Osborne suggested, from the sideboard.

"Ale and beef, I think; I believe I am getting hungry."

Osborne brought over the materials, and they were soon hard at work.

"This is bachelor life in London, Douglas. Primitive, is it not?" he said, emptying his tumbler at a draught.

"A right good life when one has money

enough to keep it up, Osborne. I should not mind a turn at it myself."

"Always excepting the law books," Frederick answered. "You would not like to be knocking your head against calf-skin volumes, I'll engage."

"I don't think they have done you much good so far. By all accounts, you have not paid for the ale and beef out of them yet, Fred."

"Never mind. There's a good time coming. You may have your joke now, but I'll win by-and-bye. I'm like the fellow that set up the apothecary's shop at the corner of a street once, and then prayed that a nobleman, or a baronet at the very least, might be tumbled out of his carriage, and be carried into his shop, in hopes that the accident would make his fortune. I am praying that some lucky chance may knock over my leader when I happen to get a brief in a great case, just at the moment when he is going to speak, and so oblige me to take his place; and that I may carry away judge and jury, and win the case," Osborne said, with his



old cynical laugh. "That would beat the apothecary, and the nobleman."

"You are just the old sixpence you used to be at Stedleigh, Osborne," Archie said, laughing at his friend's sarcasm against himself.

"Aye, neither changed nor spent, my boy," Osborne answered. "But how are the Stedleigh people getting on? What are Harry and your sister about? I thought we should have had the wedding before this."

"Well, so I thought. I don't know how it was, my father did not hurry to arrange about the settlements, and the lawyers are in no hurry either. It seems they won't be ready for a month to come."

"It is great luck for Harry to get that beautiful place."

"Greater luck for him to get Marion," Archie said, warmly. "She would be a wife for any man without a penny."

"Wives without pennies are out of fashion now," Osborne said, with a shake of his head. "A man has enough to do to keep himself, and my doctrine just chimes with what a

military friend of mine said, the other day. A woman ought always to be able to pay her own mess."

"Nonsense, Osborne. If a fellow gets a girl he likes, what matter who pays the mess?"

"Take care, Douglas; you talk very like a man who was on the brink of making a fool of himself, and had some girl without a farthing in his eye. You are time enough for matrimony these ten years."

"I was speaking generally," Archie answered, a little confused.

"Of course you were, we all enjoy the pleasure of talking generally, and into ourselves at the same time," Osborne said, with a faint smile playing round his lips. "But what are we going to do to-night? that's more to the purpose."

"I am going to the Opera, with my cousin and Lady Mackenzie."

"And I am going too? you asked me," Osborne said, gravely.

"Did I?" Douglas answered, with a laugh.

"Yes, you did; or if you did not, you came to ask me, and that's the same thing. You and I will go up Oxford Street presently, eat our dinner, then take a turn into the billiard-rooms to have a game, and go to York Place, in time for the Opera. Do you like the programme?"

"Capital; you dine with me, and I ask you to go to the Opera, that smoothes things," Douglas replied.

They sat another half an hour talking, and then sallied forth on their way to Oxford Street, Osborne locking his door and putting the key in his pocket.

"This is another room of mine," he said, crossing the lobby, and throwing open a door. "Come in and see it."

"Aye, that's more like the thing," Archie said, standing on the threshold and looking all round.

It was a square room, similar in size to the one they had left, but very differently furnished. The ground of the carpet was dark brown, marked with small squares of yellow, with a circular brown spot in the centre of

each. A large oblong table, standing on four massive legs, supported by castors that seemed as if they were never to run, occupied the middle of the room. The top of this table was edged with mahogany, the centre being covered with black leather, upon which a large mahogany desk was placed. Some carefully folded endorsed letters, fastened by straps, lay on the desk, and by the side of it, were two or three thick papers, tied with red tape, which looked like briefs, but were not.

Before the desk a heavy arm-chair was laid, and two or three other weighty mahogany ones were placed against the wall. Several shelves, reaching from the floor almost to the ceiling, occupied one end of the room, and these shelves were plentifully filled with books—large calf-skin volumes, whose heavy outside was only equalled by their heaviness within.

“ You have a fine lot of books, Osborne,” Archie said, glancing at the well covered shelves.

“ Yes if they were all real. The lower

ones are as true as steel, but two-thirds of the upper volumes are dummies."

"What the mischief did you do that for?"

"Just for this, it looks imposing. I don't say they are books, you know: but by holding my tongue, I make people believe a lie without telling it."

The thing itself, added to Osborne's grave dry sneering manner of explaining it, made Archie laugh.

"You are the queerest fellow I ever met with in my life," he said. "By Jove, I have learned how to furnish my library at the Grange, when I set up house."

"It would not answer there, Douglas. A library ladder, and an inquisitive friend would soon find it out. Leave roguery to the lawyers, and take my advice, it's their trade."

"This is your regular den, then, Osborne? I thought the other very different to my notions of a Barrister's Chambers, and a great deal more comfortable."

"Those are my private quarters, where

only my friends have right of entrance. This is a place of another sort. It's my potter's field, to bury strangers in."

"Oh, Osborne," Archie said, "what put such a thing in your head?"

"Nonsense, man, you have not got rid of your old fashioned notions. The nursery tales, and nursery reverences, are sticking to you yet. Here, come out quick, there's a bogie behind you. You don't believe that; Well, I wonder you don't."


"Come along and let us get our dinner. There will be a bogie in York Place, if I'm late for the Opera."

"I want to know what sort this cousin of your's is," Frederick asked, as they ran down stairs.

"Very handsome, I can tell you; more so than most of the ladies I hear talked about."

"So much the better. I like handsome women. If ever I marry, and that I can afford it, I'll marry a handsome woman."

And the two young men passed into the



street, Osborne shutting the door with a bang, which frightened a great white cat, that happened at that moment to be creeping stealthily up the kitchen stairs.



## CHAPTER VII.

## LADY OSBORNE.

THE house in York Place was not Lady Mackenzie's, as some people might suppose it to be. The chairs and ottomans on which her visitors sat, and the amber-covered sofa, where she placed herself, prim and starched for a number of hours each day, was not her own property; for sometimes a part, and sometimes the entire of the season during the last ten years, Lady Mackenzie had hired the house ready furnished. The owners of it were friends of her own, and had been friends of the late lamented Sir Ronald Mackenzie, before her ladyship married him.



The matter was readily arranged between them. Mr. and Mrs. Dalton had no children, and were glad to spend some of the hot weeks out of London. They had no interest in the London season, and resigned their house in York Place to Lady Mackenzie for a moderate consideration, measured by their friendship, and her ladyship's means. The price suited her purse, and the neighbourhood suited her ambitious west end longings. York Place, Portman Square, looked well on the cover of her ladyship's letters. True, Portman Square was not what it used to be. Many of its old inhabitants had seceded from it, and gone elsewhere; but some of them lingered about it still, and Lady Mackenzie was content to sit in the shadow of its fading grandeur, some two months of each year, and talk to her Scotch friends of her west end residence, and the delights of London for the other ten.

The last two seasons Helen Douglas had brightened the house with her presence. The Mackenzies and the Douglasses were distantly related. Lady Mackenzie always called Angus Douglas her cousin, although, if there were a

## CHAPTER VII.

### LADY MACKENZIE.

THE house in York Place was not Lady Mackenzie's, as some people might suppose it to be. The chairs and ottomans on which visitors sat, and the amber-covered sofa, where she placed herself, grim and starched for number of hours each day, was not her property; for sometimes a part, and so through the entire of the season during the two years, Lady Mackenzie had hired the house ready furnished. The owners of the furniture were friends of her own, and had been friends of the late lamented Sir Ronald Mackenzie before her ladyship married him.

Miss Douglas was very beautiful, and very much admired. She made quite a stir and a buzz in a drawing-room. Ladies who liked this stir and buzz, and had no sons of their own to be put in danger, were glad to have Miss Douglas, and cared very little about throwing her in the way of other people's sons.

It was Helen's third season, and not married yet, the ladies were beginning to say, although some of them had seen six themselves, without carrying off a prize.

"Ah, not married yet, but going to be," the whisper went round. That whisper, which first issued from the discreet lips of Lady Mackenzie, silenced the envious tongues of the chattering ladies.

"Yes, there they are now," and Lady Mackenzie's carriage rolled in through the gates at the Marble Arch. Helen Douglas sat with her back to the horses, Archie Douglas beside her. Lady Mackenzie was opposite, and the seat next to her ladyship was occupied by another gentleman.

"Which of them is it?" a young equestrian

asked of a gentleman who rode beside her. The young man who sat next to Lady Mackenzie bowed to her friend. He had a swarth, handsome face, and roving, dark eyes, with strongly marked eyebrows. "Was it he who bowed?"

"No, the other one. That is Mr. Osborne, I met him at his uncle's."

"The one next Miss Douglas is Mr. Douglas of Stedleigh then. I have seen the Manor, what a splendid place it is," and the party rode on.

"Mr. Douglas of Stedleigh," Lady Mackenzie always delighted to call Archie. It sounded grand, and Lady Mackenzie dearly loved grandeur, even if it had no reality, as this certainly had not, for Archie was not Mr. Douglas of Stedleigh, but Mr. Douglas of the Grange at best, seeing as we know, that Stedleigh belonged to Marion. Mr. Douglas had a son and daughter; every one knew that, but few knew more, consequently there were not many to question Lady Mackenzie's assertion; and all her ladyship's circle fully believed in Archie being heir

to that "magnificent place," as her ladyship styled it. "Miss Douglas was making a good thing out of her beauty," those ladies who had been counting her seasons said, when they could say nothing else, and so the matter rested.

It was early for the ring yet, so early, that a scattered few of the first arrivals had it all to themselves. Lady Mackenzie and her party had no intention of making one of them. The carriage drove on along the park, past the barracks, out through one of the upper entrances, and stopped at a house in Prince's Gate. They were going to call on Lady Osborne, her ladyship having left cards in York Place, for Lady Mackenzie, and Miss Douglas. The old Admiral had written to Sir George, expressing a wish that Lady Osborne should call on Helen, and her ladyship lost no time in complying with the request. There was to be a close connection between the families. Harry Osborne was to marry Miss Douglas of Stedleigh, in a month or so, and Miss Douglas's brother was going to marry Helen, the Admiral

believed. Indeed every one believed it except Marion, and Grace Clifford.

It was to return the visit so paid by Lady Osborne, that Lady Mackenzie and Helen drove to Prince's Gate. Her ladyship was at home, but she was evidently on the point of going out, for a pretty phaeton with two beautiful white ponies, stood before the door. A servant was standing on the flag way, holding the reins, until her ladyship came to claim them.

When Lady Mackenzie and her party were shewn into the drawing-room, they found Sir George and Lady Osborne together. Her ladyship was dressed ready to go out, and Sir George was sitting by the window, evidently not intending to accompany her. He rose and leant his hand on the back of his chair, while he bowed to the visitors, whom the servant had announced, and then shaking hands, not very warmly, with his nephew, sat down again, as if glad to be restored to his comfortable seat.

He was a much taller man than the Admiral, and might have been handsome

when he was young, but he was seventy-four now, and the fresh roundness of youth had long given place to a flabby softness. His chin was large, and dropped down in loose rolls of flesh over his shirt collar. Heavy grey eyebrows, overhung a pair of light blue eyes, the lids of which he generally kept half shut, and as he sat in the window, with a hand on each arm of his chair, seemingly thinking of nothing, and looking at nothing, he was like a great tom cat dosing in the sun.

"I am so glad I was not out," Lady Osborne said, making up by her bright smile for the apathy of her husband. "Five minutes later and I should have been gone," and laying down the gloves she had been about to draw on her hands when they entered, her ladyship threw herself into a chair, and began chatting to her visitors.

How pretty she was, as she lounged against the soft cushions of the low easy chair. She had a fair young face, shaded by hair of a light brown, which lay in a soft roll against the

pale brown of her cheek. Long eyelashes fell over large, dark blue eyes, and her low, smooth forehead was marked by beautifully arched eyebrows.

What a wife for the poor feeble old dotard sitting by the window! Who could have stood by to witness that marriage, and say there was no impediment why it should not be? There is something hideous in the love from age to youth, when that love is such as Sir George Osborne offered to his young bride. Something hideous in the love which comes with a tottering step, and a bribe in each hand.

Archibald Douglas sat looking at the sweet girl wife, and the half doting, puerile husband, with a shudder at his heart. Was the world made up of such marriages and such sacrifices as this? Were there many of them, as Frederick Osborne had seemed to say there were? Could youth and beauty like Lady Osborne's, be bought like any other marketable article, as the gloves he wore, and the ring on his finger had been purchased. One instance was before him, and



if that one, why not others? God help us, what a world it is, in its grandeur, its tinsel, and its guilt.

Archie remembered the night he sat by the sea shore at Stedleigh with Frederick, and talked of Lady Osborne. He had pointed to her as an illustration, that the fairest women will give themselves in exchange for rank and wealth, to such senile husbands as the miserable old man, who sits blinking in the sun by the window yonder. He had said Lady Osborne was one of the prettiest women in London, and the greatest flirt. Pretty she was certainly, more than pretty as Douglas thought, but he saw no sign of the flirting portion of the story. Archie knew what a flirt was, or he fancied he knew. He was acquainted with Miss Craig. Miss Craig was Archie's type of a flirt. Poor Miss Craig with her eager smile, pleasant light chat, and harmless fun, which she herself even admitted to be flirting. How shallow it was in comparison to the more dangerous beauty, and more dangerous fascinations of Lady Osborne, as she throws up her soft

bright eyes, and asks Archie how he likes London.

"Pretty well, very well I may say, Lady Osborne," Archie answered, glancing round at Frederick, and then at Helen, as if he thought his cause of enjoyment lay with them, and Lady Osborne, thanks to the Admiral's hint, interpreted the look towards Helen in her own way. Yet at the moment Archie was thinking of Grace, and it was that thought which made him say pretty well at first to Lady Osborne's question.

"London is not a new place to you, Miss Douglas," her ladyship said, turning her sweet smile right upon Helen. "You are enjoying it as usual, I suppose. But it does get tiresome after a little while, does it not?" and Lady Osborne gave a slight shrug to her pretty shoulders.

"I don't think so, perhaps I do not see enough of it to get tired," Helen answered.

"I should like to have your receipt against weariness," Lady Osborne said.

"Then try the air of our Scottish moun-

tains, Lady Osborne, nothing will kill *ennui* so effectually."

Lady Osborne smiled, and turned to Lady Mackenzie.

"It must be very pleasant for you to have Miss Douglas with you, Lady Mackenzie. Admiral Osborne tells us they are all moping at Stedleigh since she left."

"Yes; she and I are accustomed to each other. I shall find it very strange when the time comes when I shall have her no more at York Place," Lady Mackenzie said, 'with a perceptible Scotch accent, which she had been many years trying in vain to get rid of.

Lady Osborne laughed.

"Some other house will be brighter for your loss, Lady Mackenzie."

"I wonder would I be missed in Chancery Lane, if I took it into my head to levant some morning?" Frederick Osborne asked with a smile. "The barristers would not put on their wigs awry with grief, in consequence of my absence from court."

"I should miss you Osborne," Archie said.

"Yes, when you wanted a place to lounge in, and smoke cigars."

"Oh those horrid cigars. Don't let him lead you into smoking, Mr. Douglas," her ladyship said, with another little shrug.

"I am afraid I smoked before I saw him, Lady Oshorne. He will not have that sin to answer for," Archie replied.

"I am glad you quarrel with cigars, Lady Osborne," Lady Mackenzie observed, "they are dreadful, smoking ruins furniture." And Lady Mackenzie remembered how Archie had filled the dining-room with smoke in York Place, one day he dined there. It was only one day, however, for her ladyship was not generous with her dinner invitations.

"Cigars against crinoline," Osborne said. "When the ladies leave off crinoline we shall leave off cigars."

"The world will come to an end then, I think," Helen replied, giving a little cough, and a glance at Lady Mackenzie, which told that lady she was tired of the visit, and wished her to go.

There is no need of words for these femi-

nine telegraphs. Lady Mackenzie rose at once. They made their adieus to Sir George, who, looking as little interested as when they came in, rose, bowed, and sat down again. And then, accompanied by Lady Osborne, who was going to her phaeton, the party filed out of the drawing-room, and made their way down stairs.

"What beautiful flowers, Lady Osborne!" Douglas, who was behind her ladyship, said, as he looked through the glass doors of a conservatory, at the foot of the first flight of stairs.

"You are fond of flowers, are you?"

"Yes; they remind me of Stedleigh. I have seen no such flowers since I left home."

"Sir George is very particular about these. We brought them all from the hothouse at the Park," Lady Osborne said, for the first time alluding to her husband.

"By-the-bye I forgot to tell Sir George that my father will call to return his visit to-morrow, he expects."

"Then do you come with him, and I shall show you the conservatory," Lady Osborne answered with one of her pretty smiles.

"With pleasure," Archie answered, as he handed her into her phaeton.

"What do you think of my aunt?" Osborne asked Archie, as they sat alone that evening in Mr. Douglas's rooms, Mr. Douglas himself having dined out with an old friend.

"She is a lovely woman!" Archie answered, warmly; "a lovely woman. It is a pity to see her so matched."

"She does not think so. She has it all her own way with that old fellow, I can tell you; and she knew on which side her bread was buttered when she took him."

Archie shook his head, and sipped his wine.

"She was made for something better than that, Osborne," he said.

"You may think so, but I don't. What do people want but money? Sir George has money, and Lady Osborne requires nothing else."

"Men may find other things to supply the want of home affection," Archie said, "but women can't do without it; and there can be no affection in such a marriage as that."

"A sermon, by Jove. The parson's little

daughter spoke there Douglas ; that's her teaching. But don't you fret about Lady Osborne's affections, she has none."

"I can't believe it, Osborne, she looks so kind, and so good."

"Pooh, it's part of the play. The safety of such women as her lies in this—that they have no heart. When you know as much of Lady Osborne as I do, you will find that she has no heart."

And Osborne, lighting a cigar, let the subject drop.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## NEWS IN THE STEDLEIGH STANDARD.

It is very easy for people to chalk out a line for themselves, although it may not always be quite so easy to walk along it. Archie Douglas had marked one of these out before he left Stedleigh, but he had not walked upon it yet. He had determined to set matters straight about his cousin when he came to London, "Have it out with his father," as he expressed himself in his thoughts. He had told Marion he meant to take this course, and Marion, as we have seen, advised him to let matters rest. He had scoffed at her counsel, it is



true, but he acted upon it nevertheless, and so far had not broached the subject.

They had been a week in London, and he was a constant visitor at York Place. Under any circumstances this would have been but natural, considering his near relationship to Helen. Lady Mackenzie would expect it, and Helen would expect it, but at the same time he knew that his visits were not looked upon as paid under ordinary circumstances, but as calls tending to something else. He saw at a glance on his first arrival that Lady Mackenzie so thought, and before he was three days in London, he saw that Helen held the same opinion. Perhaps he had deceived her unintentionally at Stedleigh; if he had he was sorry for it, but he could not for a moment dream of correcting the mistake by making her his wife.

Archie Douglas was not a vain man. He did not puff himself up with the notion that his cousin was madly in love with him, ready to fly to the Regent's canal, or a dose of

laudanum, if he did not return her love. He was by no means sure that she loved him very much. He knew she liked him, she had always evinced that, and he was getting very sure that she was disposed to marry him. If things went on much longer in this way, he would get into a difficulty not readily got out of. It is not very easy for a man to visit day after day at a house, where he sees those visits are expected to end in matrimony, and then to walk off with a bow. Archie would not be allowed to escape in that cool way, from the net spread at York Place.

Neither Helen nor Helen's friend, Lady Mackenzie, were by any means as simple as Grace Clifford. Grace would have ignored all Archie's speeches, hand pressings, and little tender sentences; and let him marry Helen without supposing herself very hardly dealt with. She would have smothered her regret, and tried to bury her love, and be ready to think rather that she had misunderstood him, than that he had wilfully deceived her. But Helen was not one to be played ast and loose with, even if Archie wished to

do it, which he did not. He had let things run too far already, so far that if he did not look out very sharply, and very soon, he would find himself at loggerheads with Lady Mackenzie, Angus Douglas, and his own father. He had done very well while they were at Stedleigh, and kept his attentions to Helen on a strictly cousinly footing.

As far as Stedleigh was concerned, he could fall back on the relationship. He had been attentive to his cousin, people might misconstrue it if they pleased, indeed they had misconstrued it already. He had contradicted their constructions to Miss Harland, and Miss Harland had not failed to propagate the contradiction. If the Stedleigh people refused to believe it, it was none of his fault.

At Stedleigh Helen had been his cousin, and his mother's guest, consequently she had full right to his special attention. In London the case was different. He had no business to go to London. That journey was his first wrong step. He should have spoken openly to his father at Stedleigh, and told him he

could not go to London, with Helen. That the world was judging and reporting his intention to marry her; and that if he went to London in her train, it would go on so reporting and judging. He ought to have done this, but he had not; so now the York Place net was growing very strong.

Lady Mackenzie had been old enough to know how to angle, and just young enough to have a chance of marrying, when she drew the late Sir Ranald into her meshes at a watering place, in the short space of six weeks. She had won a title, and a jointure for herself by that clever move, and she was now anxious to win a fortune, if not a title for her young friend.

No one knew better than her ladyship how to let a man run on a line of rail for a certain time, and then, when he stopped short, or wished to turn back, to pull him up, and make him go on again, whether he would or not.

Archie came and went as he pleased to York Place. Lady Mackenzie's house was always open to him, but Lady Mackenzie took care

to let his visits seem something else than the visits of a cousin. There could be no drives or sight seeing without Archie. If Archie did not come Helen stayed at home expecting him. And Lady Mackenzie let him know, when he did arrive, that they had stayed at home on his account.

Young ladies do not keep themselves disengaged for their cousins, but Archie saw that Helen kept herself disengaged for him. It was rather a bore to be expected to dance attendance on her, when he would have preferred amusing himself after his own fashion, under the guidance of Frederick Osborne. A gallop round a ball room, or a quiet evening in York Place with Helen Douglas, did not always compensate for the loss of a jolly supper with a few pleasant fellows, down in Osborne's chambers, out of the ken of crinoline.

"Have you any notion of marrying that handsome cousin of yours, Douglas?" Osborne asked him one day, after he had been introduced to Helen.

"Not a bit," was Douglas's answer.

"Then I'd recommend you to look out, my boy, or that old lady that has the charge of her will snaffle you. I'd cut if I were you."

And Archie, who had spent the day at Richmond with his friend, went up to York Place about nine o'clock with serious notions of profiting by the last sentence of Osborne's advice.

Lady Mackenzie met him at the top of the first landing, and saluted him with—

"Dear me, Mr. Douglas, where have you been all day?"

"At Richmond, with my friend Osborne, and a delightful day we had."

"Yes, I suppose so; but it was more than poor Helen and I had, moped in the house, with tickets for the horticultural fête lying on the table, and you not here to take us. We were so disappointed."

"My father would have gone, Lady Mackenzie. I am sorry you relied upon me."

"Helen would not go without you. Mr. Marchmont called and wanted to go with her: but Helen thought you would be vexed, if you came and found us gone."

"Not at all. If I had any mind to go—which I had not—I could have followed you. Never allow me to interfere with your arrangements or hers again. Cousins are not given to be punctilious generally."

"I don't know that, Mr. Douglas," her ladyship replied, shaking her head.

"Well, indeed, Lady Mackenzie, both cousins and brothers are apt to be forgetful sometimes," Archie said, boldly classing the relations together, as if to show Lady Mackenzie he considered them much the same.

"Cousins and brothers meant different things in my day, Mr. Douglas," she answered, going on up stairs. "I was engaged to a cousin once, I remember."

"Indeed," he said; and her ladyship, without giving him time for further reply, opened the drawing-room door and walked in.

"Archie, where have you been?" his father said, as Archie followed Lady Mackenzie into the drawing-room. "You disappointed Helen about the fête."

"I am sorry you did not take Helen yourself," Archie said, as he bowed to Mrs. Kep-

pel, a friend of Lady Mackenzie, who sat near to Mr. Douglas.

"She would not care for the escort of such an old man as I am: but go over there and make your excuse."

Helen sat on a sofa at the farther end of the room; and as Archie approached, fat Sir Roger Gilgreest, who was sitting by her, got up to make room for him, and strolled over to join a whist party, that was just forming. Archie was not in the best of humours, and was neither fluent in his apologies, nor penitent for his neglect. Helen was obliged to take him as she found him, and was beginning to think she had been a fool not to go to the fête with Mr. Marchmont.

Archie Douglas worked through the evening in a sort of civil sulk, which he excused on the score of being tired. He did not like the way they were going on in York Place; he did not like having Helen thrust upon him, as his father and Lady Mackenzie were thrusting her. It was quite evident that people in London were giving him to Helen, as people in Stedleigh had given him to her.



There was always way made for him to sit near her. When he approached her men silently gave up their places to him, as Sir Roger Gilgreest had given up his, thus tacitly admitting that they had no right to engross her attention when he was by. This was provoking, to say the least of it, as he had no idea of interfering with anybody's right, or of claiming a right himself, seeing he had claimed one elsewhere. And Archie went away from York Place that night, resolved to bring matters to a crisis with his father. He would take Osborne's advice, and cut, as that gentleman expressed it; but he must first fight it out with his father. He would speak to him in the morning.

When the morning came Archie hurried down to breakfast, ready armed for the battle, if battle there was to be: but when he looked in his father's face he thought better of it. Mr. Douglas was drinking his coffee, eating his toast, and reading the newspaper at the same time. It was a county paper, and gave a lengthy account of Mr. Hamilton's arrival at the Priory: how the tenants lighted bon-

fires, and the fatted ox was killed, roasted, and eaten on the lawn, and how all his old friends went to welcome him, and joined in the festivities. It was a flaring local report, such as local reports usually are, and Mr. Douglas's face gathered blackness as he read it.

This man, whom people delighted to honour—this man, who had come from France to take possession of his old home, and mingle amongst his old friends, was to him as Mordecai who met Haman at the gate.

Mr. Douglas could not carry a high hand with Mr. Hamilton as he had carried it with Tom Williams. Tom had been turned out of the Hill farm, and sent forth from the place which had been his forefathers in generations past, before Mr. Douglas set foot in Stedleigh. But Mr. Douglas, with all the will to do it, lacked the power to injure Mr. Hamilton. He could not trample on him as he had trampled on the Williamses. He had tried it once, twenty years ago, and it did not succeed very well. Mr. Hamilton had been victorious, and Mr. Douglas was several hundred pounds out of pocket. He did not mind about the

money, he cared little for that, but he had been beaten in the contest, and that he never forgave. He might annoy Mr. Hamilton by opposing his son at the election if he stood for Cranston ; but there were two things to be considered in that question. In the first place there might be no election at all. Mr. Brownlowe was still getting better, and might not resign. In the next place, even if he did, Mr. Hamilton might be successful, and the momentary annoyance of the opposition, be lost in the triumph of success.

"That is a fine account of Hamilton's arrival at the Priory, Archie," his father said presently, throwing him over the paper. "They give him a whole column, a sure sign that they had not much else to fill it with."

Archie took the paper, and felt still more certain this was not the time to speak.

To us, who know so much of Mr. Douglas's mind, this speaking, be it when it would, was likely to be an unpleasant business, and even Archie, who only knew his mind tended towards having Helen for a daughter-in-law, without knowing the entire reason, confessed

as much to himself. It would not be so difficult to him if he could touch the subject with clean hands. If he could say that he did not wish to marry so early, that he had no desire to trammel himself with Helen Douglas, or with any other woman. But he could not say this under any circumstances, still less after his imprudent declaration to Grace Clifford. Had he only been wise enough to follow his resolve, of simply denying to Grace his intention of marrying Helen, without giving her an explicit explanation of his feelings towards herself, he might have had some chance of seizing the question of his marriage with Helen and strangling it. Not much, as we know, but some, as he thought himself. Now the case was different. Those mad, quick words spoken to Grace on the spur of sudden impulse, prevented his coming to his father unfettered, as a free man, with a free choice, desirous to decline a marriage because he did not choose to marry the woman selected for him, and not because he loved some other woman, and had promised to marry her instead.

It was that which had kept Archie silent in London the past week ; and now when he had made up his mind to act decisively, his father's ruffled temper about Mr. Hamilton kept him silent still. He would go down to Stedleigh, see his mother, Marion, and Grace, and then come back and speak to his father. He was longing for a look at Grace, longing for a word with her. The wish to go came suddenly as he was reading the paragraph respecting Mr. Hamilton.

"It must have made a great stir in Stedleigh," Archie said, laying down the paper and proceeding with his breakfast. "I dare say Mr. Hamilton was gratified with his reception."

"I should say so: he was always a man for popularity," Mr. Douglas answered, and the subject dropped.

"When will they have Osborne's settlements ready? I found a letter from him on my dressing-table last night inquiring about them," Archie said.

"Not for these three weeks ; he is getting in a great hurry all of a sudden," Mr. Douglas

replied, to whom we know Marion's marriage never was agreeable.

"I have a great mind to run down and answer his letter in person."

"To Stedleigh? What has put that idea in your head?" Mr. Douglas asked in surprise.

"I don't know," Archie answered, making a dart at a pigeon pie. "I have taken a fancy to see them all. I would only be away a day."

"When are you thinking of going?"

"By the eleven o'clock train. I would be at Stedleigh at two, and catch them at luncheon."

Mr. Douglas saw no reason to suspect the arrangement as having a second motive, and he had no wish to thwart Archie, more especially now, as he was leading him up to the point, he and Angus Douglas had fixed on some months before, and he had a shrewd notion Archie had no fancy to take the required leap, which, however, he was determined he should take.

"I suppose you may as well have your

whim. But remember, I'll expect you back to dinner at six to-morrow evening," he said after a moment's thought, and taking up his paper again, re-read the paragraph regarding Mr. Hamilton.

## CHAPTER IX.

## COMING HOME.

How pleasant coming home is when the hearts that wait for you are warm, and the welcome that meets you is true. Have you ever sat in the train and thought of the pleasant home voices and the pleasant home faces that were to greet you at your journey's end, while the puffing engine and the rumbling carriages were momentarily bringing you nearer? If you have not, I pity you. If you never knew the gladness of coming home, I repeat I pity you. A gladness so great and new every time we try it, that it



is worth going away for the sake of enjoying the sensation.

Archie Douglas was coming home. It was a warm, bright day, and the light smoke from the engine floated past the window of the first-class carriage where he sat, looking out on the well-known country that lay between Crans-ton and Stedleigh. He could see the broad winding road down which he had ridden on the evening he saw Grace at Miss Harland's; that evening when he had done the rash thing which he had declared to himself over and over again he would not do. He was thinking of Grace as she sat by him then with her hand in his, and her head resting on his shoulder, and he was thinking of her still when the train stopped at the Stedleigh station.

He was near to her now, although she did not know it. He must go home before he called at the Rectory. It would look very strange if he went there first in place of the Manor, and the time was not come when he might do strange things openly.

He got out of the carriage on to the platform.

"I am glad to see you back, sir," said one of the porters, touching his cap.

"I am glad to be back myself, and sorry it's only for a day. I go up again to-morrow."

"Aye, sir, you are tired of London, I suppose. Shall I call a fly?"

"Well, yes, Jenkins, if you please."

"Any luggage in the van, sir?" the man asked, as he and Archie went to the entrance door.

"No, I just brought myself, that's all. Oh, Williams, how do you do?" and Archie meeting our old friend Tom on the top of the steps, suffered the porter to pass on in search of the fly while he spoke to him.

"I be proud to see you, Mr. Archibald," Tom said with a pleased, frank smile on his handsome face, which looked far handsomer with that smile on it than it did when he scowled after Archie's father the day they met at the hill farm. "How do you like London, sir?"

"Tolerably, Tom. How are you getting on with your new farm?"

"Very well, sir. It be first-rate land, sir; better than we had on the hill, only just we liked the other place best." And Tom's face darkened.

"I am sorry you had to leave it, but my father acted as he thought right."

"You be not thinking it right, sir?"

"I don't know, Tom," Archie said with a light laugh. "I might not have done it, but he may have been right after all, you know."

"Aye, but he wasn't. However, you have nothing to say to it, sir, nor Miss Douglas either."

"It was all Will Davis's doings, Williams."

"Well, yes, sir, he let his tongue run foolish before he died. But how does Mr. Douglas know he meant me at all, even suppose he knew what he was saying?"

"He thought it was you, and my father is strict about his hares."

"He be strict about everything for the matter of that, sir. But thoughts ought not

to do in such things. People can't hang a man upon thoughts."

"Very true. However, there is no use going over old ground. I am glad you are doing well at your new farm. How is your mother and John?"

"Very well, sir, I thank you. John has a farm of his own; we halved the land. My mother let me have the lease of the other half in my own name, and we settled between us about the stock, and all that. I was expecting her by this train. She went up to Cranston to-day, and as she be not come I must watch the next."

"Tell her I was asking for her, and that I am glad to hear she is well. And now I must say good morning, Tom; for I must hurry on to Stedleigh."

"Good morning, sir, and I say again I be glad to see you back. Can I do anything for you, sir? Look to luggage, or anything?"

"No, thank you, Williams," Archie answered, gratified at a civility which was all the greater when we consider the feud between him and

Mr. Douglas : " I brought no luggage, I only came for a day.

" Well, sir, if I could do that or anything else for you, I'd be glad," Williams said, touching his cap, and moving away.

How little Archie thought, as he stepped into the fly, that a time might come when Williams's friendly feeling would be called in question. How little any of us know how the small may help the great.

It was a stiff pull up the hill at Stedleigh, but the horse got to the top at last, and then trotted along the road at a pretty good pace. There was the little church and its trim walk bordered by the closely-cut grass, dotted over with white grave stones, that glittered in the sunlight. Then came the Rectory in its setting of evergreens, the low wall flanked with trees, the green gate, and the neatly gravelled walk. Archie put his head out of the window as he passed, and strained his eyes in the endeavour to catch a glimpse of some one about the house. A light muslin dress came fluttering through the evergreens. The wearer crossed the path to the other side, and vanished.

Archie's heart beat for a moment—only for a moment. It was not Grace, but Jane, with her laughing eyes and bright face, and who never saw either Archie or the fly.

She could not tell Grace he had come to Stedleigh, and he would go down in the evening to surprise her by his presence. But if Grace should not be at home? no matter, she would be at The Cliff, or Miss Harland's, and he would follow her—he had a right to follow her now. Then he remembered the time he had followed her when he had no such right, and he smiled at his daring invasions of Miss Harland's quiet home.

He was still thinking of it, when the road wound round, and the wide gates and grand old trees of Stedleigh Manor were before him.

The lodge keeper admitted him, curtsying, as she threw back the gates, and his humble fly was crunching the gravel on the broad drive at Stedleigh.

The sunlight was shining on the windows, the long shadows of the trees lay across the ground, and the white waters of the lake were dancing in the sunbeams, but all was still life.

There were no figures flitting about the lawn or behind the windows, and Archie sprang from the fly, without anyone having discovered his arrival. Hastily putting some money in the hand of the expectant driver, Douglas ran up the steps and rang the bell.

"Well, Traynor," he said to the astonished servant who answered his summons, "you are surprised to see me. Where is my mother?"

"In her dressing-room, sir, I think," the man answered. "Miss Douglas is out about the grounds somewhere."

Archie ran up stairs. "What a surprise it will be to her," he thought, as he tapped at the door of his mother's room. In another moment he was within it, with her arms about his neck."

"My darling Archie! how welcome you are."

"It was a stolen march, mother; stolen to see how glad you and Marion would look. How is Marion?"

A quick, light step up the stairs, and along the corridor, and Mrs. Douglas's dressing-room was opened without ceremony.

"They told me you were come, Archie, dear. What a rogue you are to take us by surprise!" Marion cried, as she entered without her hat, and a light Bernous round her shoulders.

"You are looking so well! You nave got such a colour, Marion!" Archie said, as Marion's arms were twined round him, and her lips pressed to his. "Sit down, until I look at you both."

And the happy trio seated themselves, and prepared for a chat.

"Ah; there goes the luncheon bell, confound it! and we so comfortable," Archie said, with a grumble.

"Never mind, we are not slaves to hours now, Archie. We have led most dissipated lives at Stedleigh since you left us. We come down to breakfast when we like, and we dine at five o'clock instead of six. Don't we, Marion?"

Marion laughed, and assented.

"You are free niggers as long as it lasts," Archie said; "but how is Harry? Is he below all this time?"



"He has not been here to-day: he has taken to his boat again, and went out for a sail this morning," Mrs. Douglas answered.

Archie fancied there was some restraint in her manner.

"He will be here in the evening," Marion rejoined. "I am sure he will be glad to see you."

"How do you and Helen get on, Archie?" Mrs. Douglas asked.

"Pretty well."

"Only pretty well; not very well!" she said. Archie laughed.

"By-the-bye, mother, how is the Admiral, and my old flame Charlotte? I must not desert her," he said, without replying to his mother's last observation, except by the laugh.

"They are both well, and so is your other flame, Grace Clifford. You forgot to ask about Grace, Archie!"

"Did I?" he said; "I am glad to hear she is well."

His eyes wandered from his mother's face to the window, and then back again.

"There is one piece of London news I forgot to tell you. Sir George Osborne called on us, and Lady Osborne on Helen and Lady Mackenzie. What a lovely woman she is."

"What sort of man is Sir George?" Marion asked.

"An old guy: he ought to be throttled."

"Oh, Archie!"

"I beg your pardon. I forgot I was not in Chancery Lane," he answered, laughing.

"Why in Chancery Lane?" Mrs. Douglas asked.

"That is where Frederick Osborne's chambers are. Many a pleasant hour I have spent there when I could steal away from York Place. But come mother, let us get something to eat, I'm hungry."

Mrs. Douglas went down stairs first, Archie coming behind with Marion.

"Did you give Grace the letter I enclosed for her?" he asked in a whisper.

"I did. But, Archie, it is very wrong and very foolish. You must give it up."

"Nonsense, Marion. I don't give things up," he said. "What did she say?"

"I don't know. I hate to think of it. We shall all get into trouble, papa will be so angry, and mamma."

"Never mind my mother. I'll manage her. I have come to Stedleigh to speak about it."

They entered the dining-room and took their places at the table, talking of indifferent things while the servants waited.

"I'll write a note to the Cliff and invite them all to dinner," Mrs. Douglas said when they were once more alone. "They will be so astonished to see you Archie. But are you really going to-morrow?"

"I got leave of absence on condition of being in London in time for dinner to-morrow evening. Indeed, I only half hoped to get leave at all."

Then he dropped silent.

"What are you thinking of Archie?" Marion asked smiling.

"Of twenty things. In the first place, I am thinking of getting the pony phaeton and driving over to the Rectory for Grace Clifford; she would just make our party complete."

"Oh, no, I'll send a note. It would take you an hour, and your hours are precious, Archie, darling," Mrs. Douglas answered.

"Pooh, mother, I'll be down altogether next week. I'll talk to my father about it when I go back; but I must go for Grace, if only for the sake of seeing her astonishment."

Mrs. Douglas opposed no further. She saw Archie was bent on going and she knew he did not like being thwarted.

The pony carriage was soon round, and Archie was once more whirling along the road to Stedleigh Rectory. He threw the reins to the man at the gate, leaving the phaeton outside, and walked up the avenue to the house.

"Is Mr. Clifford at home?" he asked of the servant who opened the door, pretending he came to look for that gentleman.

"No, sir, he is gone to a meeting."

"Deuce take these meetings," Archie thought. "I suppose Grace is there too."

"Is Miss Clifford at home then?"

"Yes, sir."

Archie bolted through the hall and entered the drawing-room, hoping he should find none of those troublesome youngsters with her.

Grace sat on a sofa reading. She was so busy with her book that she never saw him. He shut the door and put his back against it.

"Grace," he said.

His voice was eager and low. She threw down the book and started to her feet.

"Oh, Archie, Archie."

There was no mistaking her tone of surprised welcome. He came round the table and caught her in his arms.

"My own darling how glad I am to get back to you."

He drew her to the sofa and sat down beside her.

"Are you going to stay? are you going back no more?" she asked with a glad flush on her face. "How long this week has been Archie."

"To me as well as to you Grace dearest, and next week will be long also. I must go back to-morrow but only for a few days."

"I wish I were going too."

"I wish you were. Some day we shall go together Grace."

"Yes, Archie, dear, some day."

She laid her still crimson cheek on his shoulder.

"I have come to take you over to Sted-leigh, my mother and Marion expect you. I must return to town to-morrow, and then I shall have a talk with my father and set everything right."

"No, Archie, dear; Marion and I have often spoken about it. You will set everything wrong—indeed you will. Can't you let things alone for the present?"

"If I let things alone I will get in a mess about my cousin. You don't want me to marry Miss Douglas, do you?"

"No, surely."

"Well, if I follow your advice and Marion's, I'll be expected to marry her. I shall be told I deceived and misled her, and all that sort of thing."

"But you told Miss Harland you did not think she cared to marry you, that she would be displeased at the report."

"Did I? Well, no matter. You don't think I would be such a muff as to tell Miss Harland anything else, even if I thought differently. A lady's name must be kept clear in such things, Grace. I could not say the denial was all one-sided, and then I did not know as much as I know now. Matters have assumed a more certain shape since I went to London."

"You think she wants to marry you now?"

"It does not signify what I think about her. I think my father wants me to marry her. It is with him, and not with her, I have to deal at present. I must tell him honestly I don't care about her, and try to end the matter."

"Is that all you will say?"

"Yes, that is all, if I can help it."

"Archie, darling, do help it. You must help it. We can wait till things get quiet for the rest."

"I don't know that I am much disposed towards waiting. However, get on your bonnet, and come."

He drew her face to him and kissed her,

and then she went away to tell Jane she was going to Stedleigh, and that Archie Douglas was in the drawing-room.

Jane came bounding in to welcome him, and walked down to the gate to see them set out.

"I see the way it is," Archie's servant thought as they went along. "I was the first to pick that out, anyway." And the pretty little ponies trotted briskly on, unconscious of what that drive and others were likely to brew in Stedleigh.



## CHAPTER X.

## ARCHIE AND THE ADMIRAL.

"You are a pretty lad running away from us all to London, and then running back to Stedleigh," the Admiral said to Archie, as the party from The Cliff and the party from Stedleigh sat together in the drawing-room after dinner,

"I am getting fond of change, I suppose, Admiral."

"He says he will be back to us altogether next week," Mrs. Douglas observed.

"Yes, I daresay as soon as he gets matters settled in London. When are you going to bring your wife down, Archie?"

"Wife!—what wife?" Archie asked innocently, as if he did not know the Admiral meant Helen.

"Why, the wife you have been following these three months, Miss Douglas. She will make a handsome mistress for The Grange."

"The Grange does not want a mistress just yet, Admiral."

"Then why are you getting it done up papered, painted, and all that?"

"Papered and painted? I knew nothing about it until this minute," Archie answered, in utter surprise.

This was his father's doing. He had given his orders to Watkins, as usual, without explaining, or even mentioning them to anyone else. Marion saw the light flash in Archie's eye, and she feared his quick temper would lead him to say something rash.

"Perhaps papa is going to let the place again," she said, although she did not think it.

Archie rose and went to the window. "I won't have that girl thrust on me; my father need not think it. He will look deuced fool-

ish to have his preparations go for nothing," he thought, as he looked out at the smooth grass far away, where the deer slept under the trees.

Grace Clifford was at a table, fiddling with an ivory book-knife, pushing it in and out through the leaves of a magazine.

Harry Osborne was at another table near Marion, with his head bent down over some stereoscopic views, as if intently examining them. There was a moment's silence after Marion spoke, a silence that always falls when some awkward subject has been unwittingly started: and then Archie turned from the window.

"It is getting dark," he said; "suppose we have the chandelier lighted. I would like a game of chess. Will you play, Grace?"

The room was soon a brilliant blaze of gas-light.

"So, you don't mean to marry, Archie, eh?" the Admiral said, as Grace and Archie arranged the men on the chess board.

"I did not say that, did I, Admiral?" Douglas answered, placing his queen.

"Oh, dear! I wish he would not talk about it," Marion whispered to Osborne, who made no reply.

"Well, much the same thing. I was expecting you to make a match with your cousin. I had made my mind up to that."

"You must unmake it, Admiral. Neither she nor I have an inclination that way. She thinks your nephew a much handsomer fellow than I am, I can tell you." And Archie laughed.

It was mere bantering nonsense, started haphazard. Harry Osborne raised his head quickly from the views, and pushed them away. He half opened his lips to speak, but seemed to think better of it, and said nothing. Nobody observed him except Marion. The expression of his face, and his evidently checked words, puzzled her.

"Will you give us some music, Marion?" he asked, as he met her eye; and then he stooped to put the music stool in its place.

Marion and Harry sat by the piano, alternately playing and talking. Mr. Douglas and Miss Osborne chatted at one end of the room.

The Admiral took a corner of a sofa near the chess players, and soon dropped asleep, while Archie and Grace bent whispering over the board. It was soft, low-toned whispering, not likely to disturb the sleeper.

## CHAPTER XI.

ANXIETIES AT STEDLEIGH—A CONFESSION—A  
SUDDEN JOURNEY.

Mrs. DOUGLAS was uneasy. She had been uneasy ever since she saw the flash in Archie's eye, when he found his father had been getting the Grange ready for new occupants. She knew Archie did not care for Helen, but she knew his father had set his heart on the match. He had never told her so in so many words, but she knew it as every one knew it, without his uttering a sentence. Why he should wish it, strongly puzzled her. Helen was not rich, she had a competence, but she was not rich, and what earthly reason Mr. Douglas could have for pushing

on a marriage, likely to be distasteful to his son, was beyond her reach. It could not be love of the Scotch blood which Helen would bring. It could not be a desire to see his descendants Douglas, by both members of the house, or else he would have married differently himself. He had married twice, and neither of his wives had come from across the border. Whatever it was, it could not be this notion.

She and Marion talked it over in her dressing-room before they went to bed, and could make nothing of it, unless it was that Mr. Douglas had taken some unaccountable fancy to Helen. He was not given to take fancies, however he might have done so in this instance. But then, even if so, what signified his fancy for her, if Archie had none.

It would only result in disputes, and bring father and son into collision, and no good could ever come of it. Archie would not submit, he was not a man to be twisted about, and worked into shape like wax; he was not likely to be drawn this way or that way, if he did not choose to go. He had

not a pliable nature, which only awaited the fingers of the moulder. What man worth any thing has ?

There was a certain indolence about him, a habit of procrastination, that led him to put off announcing his opinions or his decisions sometimes, as it had led him to put off speaking about Helen Douglas at once, when he ought to have spoken ; but he was none the softer for that.

When the time came, when the first blow was struck, and the first move made, he would not be less resolute, because he had deferred it.

It was this first blow, this first move, his mother was dreading now. They had been so quiet at Stedleigh until that unfortunate Scotch visit. If it had never been made they might have been quiet still. Anxieties had been creeping round Mrs. Douglas ever since. She had anxieties about Marion and Harry Osborne too ; anxieties which she kept to herself and Miss Osborne ; only these two ever spoke of them. She had never breathed a word to Marion, yet she



thought that Marion was not always satisfied or contented ; but it was only suspicion, Marion herself said nothing. Harry came and went as usual, only rather less frequently, in consequence of having taken up again with his boat ; and Harry said nothing either. This anxiety was now lost in a greater one. She had been uneasy about Archie the night before ; in the morning she was more than uneasy, she was frightened.

"You were jesting last evening in what you said to the Admiral about your cousin. You are not going to run counter to your father, Archie," she said to him at breakfast.

"Do you wish her for a daughter-in-law, mother ?" he asked, with a laugh.

"Not particularly, but I don't wish you to quarrel with your father."

"Quarrel ! bless you mother, we won't quarrel, I am in the best humour imaginable. Do I look like quarrelling ?" he said, laughing again. "How seriously you ladies take things."

Mrs. Douglas knew that men are never

more ripe for mischief than when they talk as Archie was talking then. Bantering down her fears was no proof that there was not cause for them.

"You need not laugh, Archie ; you know your father as well as I do. He has his heart set on that match, and he always carries his point."

"Not always," Archie answered, and he was not laughing this time.

"I think he is very fond of Helen," Mrs. Douglas said, shifting her ground ; "and it is your duty to submit to his wishes, indeed it is, Archie,"

"Good gracious mother, what do you want me to do ? Do you wish me to marry a woman I don't care a fig about, for duty sake. Duty and obedience have limits ; they don't go quite so far as that."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Marion. Archie rose and pushed away his cup.

"Have you any commands for The Cliff, I am going over to Harry ; we will walk back together," he said, kissing his sister.

"No, only don't be long away Archie," she answered; and Archie went out, well satisfied to get rid of the subject of his cousin.

He had determined when he came down to Stedleigh to tell his mother all about Helen, and all about Grace, as he had told Marion already; but he was not prepared to do so at the moment. He would talk to her after he had seen Osborne, he wanted to tell Harry to get him on his side. A fellow in love is entitled to the help of another fellow in love, he thought, as he went whistling over the beach.

He did not stay more than a minute or two at The Cliff, only waiting to shake hands and say a word to the Admiral, and Miss Osborne, then Harry and he started for Stedleigh. They went down along the beach, and through Stedleigh wood, walking slowly and talking about London. Harry had been there often when he was at college, and he knew every stone of it. They went on, putting their experiences together, until

they left the wood behind them, and got out on the smooth turf of the lawn.

"After all, I don't like London half so well as Stedleigh, Harry."

"Don't you, I wish you would send me back in your place then," Osborne answered.

"Run up with me. We could have a pleasant day or two. My father would be glad to see you, and so would Helen."

"No, no, I was only jesting," Harry said, shutting his eyes to the temptation that Helen's being glad to see him brought.

"You might as well shake a free foot while you have it. By the by, that reminds me, my father says the settlements will be ready in three weeks."

"Three weeks, that will be the end of May," was all Osborne said.

"You are the coolest fellow I ever met. I would have cut a caper when I heard that news, if I were in your place."

"We take things more quietly, Douglas," Osborne said, with a smile. "You are half

Irish, half Scotch, and can't understand our English ways."

"Bosh!" Archie answered, not very politely, "an Englishman in love ought to be like any other fellow in love."

"You are not in love; what do you know about it?" Harry answered, with an attempt to laugh off the subject.

"That shows how clever you are," Douglas said, throwing his cane in the air, and catching it again.

Osborne looked sharply round.

"Do you mean you are going to marry Miss Douglas, after all you said last night?" he asked, abruptly.

"No, surely: but she is not the only woman in the world. Guess nearer home."

"I don't understand you," Osborne said, although he thought he did.

"You must be very dull, then, if you don't. I'll get in a row about it, I suppose: but I can't help it."

"What have you done, Archie?"

"Just what you did. Asked a girl to marry me. You did that too, didn't you?"

"Yes," Harry answered, not very briskly, while he wished he had cut out his tongue first.

"Well, I have asked Grace Clifford. It was a foolish thing, but I couldn't help it."

"The deuce you did, Archie! when?"

"The night before I left Stedleigh. The night you thought I was at Mr. Henley's."

"You did not go to Henley's at all?"

"Not I. I went to Cranston, and saw Grace."

"Whew!" Harry said.

The tale was told, and they went along discussing it, until they came in sight of the house.

"I am going to tell my mother before I go back," Archie said, as they reached the terrace, "and then I must tell my father."

"It will be a tough job, Douglas."

"What, telling my father? Yes, I think so myself; I don't mean to say a word about Grace, though; only to declare off as regards Helen."

Harry laid his hand on his friend's shoulder—

"Tell me one thing, truly, Douglas, as friend to friend, do you think Miss Douglas likes you?"

Archie hesitated.

"I don't know : it's a plain question, Harry. This much, however, I do think, I believe she would marry me ; but I don't think she cares much about me."

"Does she care for Fred Osborne, then?"

"No, certainly not for him ; that was only nonsense I talked last night."

"So much the better for her, he is a good-for-nothing fellow."

Archie laughed.

"He would be obliged to you Harry—but here we are at home, and you must help me through, mind."

There were some visitors in the drawing-room when they went in ; and it was nearly one o'clock before they left, Archie was to leave by the two o'clock train ; so there was not much time for talking, when they found themselves alone at last.

"You will try and avoid a quarrel with your father, Archie, darling," Mrs. Douglas

said, returning to the charge, while Archie was swallowing a hasty luncheon.

"I am not going to quarrel, mother; at least, it shall not be my fault if there be a quarrel."

"But he will be very angry about your cousin," she said.

"I can't help that. I am not going to marry a girl I don't care for, if he were ever so angry. He will see the common sense of it himself."

"Yes; but if he should not?"

"Oh, but he must; he can't make me marry her if I don't choose."

"Must, Archie?" Marion repeated.

"Yes, must, Marion; I am not going to marry Helen, and that's enough. I will not be frightened into a corner, and then come out penitent."

"I don't see why he should marry if he does not like it," Osborne said, helping himself to a glass of wine.

"But he has made his father think he does like it, I am afraid; and he may say he should have said this before."



"So I ought, I'll admit that: but better late than never. Things have taken a down right matrimonial look in London; and it is time to stop it."

"Archie, dear, I feel myself dreading the whole affair; do be quiet and cautious."

Archie drew his chair over from the table, and went closer to his mother.

"Mother, listen to me for a moment. I came down from London on purpose to tell you I can't marry Helen. You want me to marry her, but you don't know what you are asking. How can I marry Helen when I love another woman?"

"Who, Archie?" and Mrs. Douglas's face flushed red with the sudden surprise.

"Marion knows, mother, Grace Clifford."

"Your father will never hear of it," she said in a tone of dismay.

"There is no need to tell him now. Let us settle about Helen first. The other can rest."

"Oh, yes, Archie, let it rest," Marion said.

"Did you know it, Harry?" Mrs. Douglas asked.

"Archie told me as we came along to-day. I suspected it two or three times before; but I did not know it."

"I would rather have Grace than Helen," Mrs. Douglas said, "only for your father."

"He will be reconciled when he finds he can't do better, Mrs. Douglas," Osborne said.

"What do you think, Marion?"

"I hope so," she said, although the tone of her voice had not much hope in it.

They sat talking in a group by the window until the carriage came round, and then Mrs. Douglas hurried off to get on her bonnet, in order to go with Archie to the train.

"You are not angry with me, mother?" he asked, as they stood on the platform by the line of carriages.

"Not a bit, Archie, your wife shall be my daughter; I like Grace better than any one else; certainly better than Helen. The only thing I fear is your father; I know he will be disappointed about her to heart,

though why he wants the match is a mystery to me."

"There is the bell, good bye mother; give a kiss to Grace for me, and tell her you know how we are circumstanced."

He entered the carriage. The train moved away from the station, and Mrs. Douglas drove home to Stedleigh with an impression of coming evil hanging over her. Marion and Harry were in the drawing-room when she returned, sitting by the window just as she had left them.

Mrs. Douglas threw her gloves on the table, went to the other window, and looked out. Archie was gone, and she had time to think, and reflect on that meeting between father and son, to which she looked forward with pain and fear.

Mr. Douglas would not take Archie's refusal to marry Helen quietly. He would not bear his favourite scheme being thwarted, even by his favourite child. The more she thought of it, the more certain she felt of this. She went through the meeting step by step, as she fancied it would be. She saw Mr.

Douglas cold, stern, resolute, facing his son, and talking down his opposition. She saw Archie resolute too, but quick, fiery, eager, working himself up from forced calmness to rapid anger. How would it all end,—which would be victorious? If it were Archie, how dearly bought might the victory be.

She moved away from the window, and drew nearer Marion. She and Osborne were talking in low tones, Marion seemingly urging something from Harry, half held back. She was flushed and eager, he hesitating, and undecided in his refusal.

“Mamma, dear, I am so uneasy about Archie; will you speak to Harry,” she said, as Mrs. Douglas approached, “I want him to go to London, and he says it would be of no use.”

“I don’t think it would, Mrs. Douglas, do you?” he said.

“You might tame Archie, and keep him quiet; or you might mediate with my father,” Marion said, without giving Mrs. Douglas time to answer.

“I fear I could not manage Archie, still

less Mr. Douglas. Do you think I could Mrs. Douglas ?”

He appealed to her again, as to what she should say. He might be of use ; might do much ; or he might be able to do nothing at all. On the other hand there were reasons why she did not wish him to go, reasons that Marion knew nothing of, and which she could not explain. Archie’s interest might be at stake, Marion’s certainly was, and she would not sacrifice her, even for that darling son.

“No Harry, it is better for you to stay here,” she said after a moment’s hesitation. “I don’t think you would do much good.”

“There, I told you Marion, I knew Mrs. Douglas would think the journey useless,” Osborne said, in a tone that savoured of disappointment, although he tried to hide it.

“Are you afraid he would come into collision with papa ; or are you afraid he would not be wise or prudent enough to bring Archie through, mamma ?”

“Of neither, dear,” Mrs. Douglas said,

taking up her gloves, and throwing them down again unconsciously.

“Of what then mamma?”

“I don’t know, of nothing, only I think it would do no good.”

Marion would not be satisfied. If Harry went, all would go well. It was her own scheme, and she set great store by it. It was not easy to resist her hopeful expectation of how his presence would smooth things. All would go right if Harry were only there. He could come back immediately and perhaps bring Archie with him. Let him only be present when Archie gave his explanation, let him support him, and talk Mr. Douglas into reason. He could do it better than Archie, he would be less likely to be excited, or lose his temper, and Mr. Douglas would be less stern, or exacting in all probability, in the presence of a third party.

It was three o’clock now, and if he left Stedleigh by the four train, he would be in London at half past seven, and he might be back to-morrow evening; nothing was so easy,

nothing so likely to bring things to a happy issue as this plan of Marion's. In Marion's own eyes it bore feasibility on the face of it, but it was fraught with danger in the eyes of Mrs. Douglas.

But there were other things to interfere. Those reasons which had operated on her decision before, still remained; they could not be done away with, they could not even be touched on, and she shook her head dissentingly.

"You will go for me; never mind mamma's head shaking, Harry, dear," Marion cried with unshaken faith in her plan.

"I do not wish to go to London, Marion, but I will go if you ask me," Osborne answered. "I will go if you think I can be of use to Archie," and he believed what he said.

"You can be of use, I know you can," and Marion carried her point but not without more discussion and objection from Mrs. Douglas. The debate lasted until it was nearly time for him to go, but still Marion carried the day.

"We will drive over to The Cliff and tell your father Harry, and mind you must be back to-morrow night. Marion, will expect you, and so shall I," Mrs. Douglas said, as Harry prepared to leave.

"Depend upon it Mrs. Douglas I want to get back, so you may rely on my being here to-morrow night," and he believed that too.

He was to walk to Stedleigh. Marion put on her hat to accompany him down the avenue.

"You will come back with an olive branch to-morrow evening," she said as they stopped a moment under a tree close to the gate. "I thank you so much for your willingness to do what I asked you."

"I was not willing Marion. Don't thank me so much, I am going only because you desire it."

"Why do you talk that way Harry, you would do more than that for Archie's sake?"

"Yes, I would do more than that for Archie's sake, but not just that," he said.



"You don't like to encounter papa."

"Never mind dear, you asked me to go, and I am going."

He put his arm round her and kissed her. He did not kiss her often of late, and his kiss now, made her cheek burn.

"You wish to lay the weight of the obligation all on me. Is that it Harry?" she questioned. "Well, I can bear it."

She smiled and held out her hand. Osborne pressed it kindly.

"You are a dear good girl, Marion. Far too good for such a worthless fellow as I am."

They were the last words he spoke. Words common enough on the lips of men, who often think that the admission half cancels a wrong.

He went out through the small gate where he had parted from Grace Clifford, the day he walked with her from the house. Marion stood watching him, as every step took him farther away from her. She saw him go on, and on, never once looking back, until a

202      ANXIETIES AT STEDLEIGH.

turn in the road hid him from her view, and then she went home again, keeping under the sheltering foliage of the trees, in order to escape the hot sunbeams.

## CHAPTER XII.

## DRIVEN ON THE ROCKS.

HARRY OSBORNE sat in the railway carriage that bore him away from Stedleigh. He sat there with his hat {drawn down over his eyes, his head dropped forward on his chest, and his fellow passengers thought he was asleep.

That journey had come about by no act or word of his. Let what would come of it, he had not sought it; on the contrary, he had opposed it, and urged its uselessness. He did not go of himself; Marion and Mrs. Douglas wished him to go, and he had gone. Mrs. Douglas was not warm about

it, but Marion was, and he was bound to respect Marion's wishes. He could not bear to leave Stedleigh while Helen Douglas stayed there; but he had said to himself that when she left it he would not attempt to follow her, and he had kept that resolution. He was not following her now, he was going for Marion's sake, to step between her hot tempered brother, and his father. Things had taken a course without any move on his part, that would if only for a moment, throw him and Helen Douglas together again.

He could not go to London without seeing her. Archie would think it odd, and Mr. Douglas would think it odd, if he refused to call at York Place. Helen herself, Archie Douglas had said, would be glad to see him; and Osborne clung to this idea, and told himself she would be disappointed perhaps if he did not call. He had determined at Stedleigh that he would let himself drift. Now the drifting was bringing him nearer to Helen, and whose fault was it? Not his surely. Was it fate that was driving him to

her, a fate beyond his control or influence? Would the stream float him along to her, and then float him away again? At all events he must float away himself, he was bound to Marion, and he would abide by it.

We all know how such abiding, and such resolves are apt to end. Once Osborne had opened his mind to thoughts about Helen, he could not keep them in one groove, he could not prevent them shifting, and with that last determination to abide by his engagement to Marion, another idea came creeping in. Was he sacrificing himself, and Helen both? Was it possible she liked him better than Archie? Once or twice the notion had come to him at Stedleigh, and now it came back again. Archie had told him that very day that he did not think she cared much about himself, and Osborne believed him.

Men's vanity is not apt to overlook love when it really exists. On the contrary, it is far more likely to create it in imagination, where it does not exist at all. Archie did not dream that Helen loved him,

consequently Osborne argued she did not love him. If on the other hand, she loved himself, if she had seen that he loved her, as she might have done perhaps, although he strove to hide it, what then? Must they two be sacrificed to his engagement with her cousin?

He dare not touch upon the subject with Helen. If he were free he would tell her he loved her, and cast everything upon the die; but he was not free, and he must be silent. If he spoke of his love, and that she did not love him, she would cast him from her presence in anger, turn from him and marry some one else. Even if she did love him, she might turn from him too, and tell him he owed it to Marion to part from her, and forget her. He felt it was dangerous thinking on the subject, dangerous and tempting. He tried to put it away from him, tried to think of Archie, and of the business that brought him to London, but it would come back again in spite of him. Station after station came in sight, passengers got out, and in without his observing them,

and the people were hurrying from the carriages to the platform, before he was aware he had reached the terminus in London.

There was the usual scene of hurry scurry at the station, when Osborne stepped out—passengers running hither and thither in search of their luggage—gentlemen calling cabs—cabmen vociferating, and cab wheels rolling over the pavement, as vehicle after vehicle drove up, or drove away. A lady with a birdcage on her finger, was racing after a railway porter, asking in a shrill key about her trunks ; the poor bewildered canary peeping out through the bars, trying to comprehend the confusion. A twirl of the bearer's arm drove the cage against Osborne, who was coming along with his eye fixed on a Hansom beyond him. Harry stopped to apologise. The poor bird, frightened out of its senses, made a resolve against travelling, and the lady darted on without replying to Osborne, as only ladies can dart, when they are fussy and confused. And Osborne getting into the Hansom, left the railway

station behind him, and was out in the stir of the streets.

It was a fine bright evening, and still daylight. People were going up this street, and down that, bent on business or pleasure. Osborne was driving along solitary, bent upon neither. His coming to London to prevent, or soften, any misunderstanding between Mr. Douglas and his son, could scarcely be called business; and as for pleasure, he did not expect to find much of that. It could not be called pleasure, for him to look at fruit which he longed for, but dare not pluck; fruit which was now, and must be for ever, far beyond his reach.

It never occurred to him until he got near Jermyn Street, that he must give a reason for his sudden journey. Mr. Douglas and Archie would be astonished to see him, and naturally expect some explanation of his visit. He could not tell Archie he had come to watch him, and keep the peace. Nothing would be more likely to nullify his good intentions, than such an announcement as



that. Still less could he say it to Mr. Douglas, who of course must not be led to suppose Archie had any intention of breaking it. What should he tell them? He had come to London to hurry his settlements. He wanted to see the lawyers himself. That would do, and although the thoughts of the settlements and his marriage, now only three weeks distant, made him twinge, it was the only feasible reason he could give.

Osborne alighted in Jermyn Street, dismissed the Hansom, and entered the hotel. He wished to see Mr. Douglas.

"Which Mr. Douglas?" the man to whom he spoke, enquired.

"Either of them, or both."

"The elder Mr. Douglas has gone to Stedleigh," the man said. "He left by a train that started about two o'clock."

It was the same hour that Archie had left Stedleigh, the father and son had passed on the road.

"Have you any idea when he may return?"

"He did not say, sir, but he left a note for the young gentleman."

“Was Mr. Archibald Douglas in then?”

He did not know: he thought he had passed out some time ago, but he was not sure.

He showed Osborne into Mr. Douglas's sitting-room. Archie was not there: his cane, and the gloves he had worn when he left Stedleigh were lying on the table, but the room was empty. Osborne stood in the middle of it, the man who had accompanied him waiting near the door. What should he do? If Mr. Douglas were gone to Stedleigh, he was not wanted in London. As far as his being required went, he might as well turn back, and go down again by the next train. But he could not leave London without seeing Archie. Should he wait for him, or go in search of him? It would be tiresome sitting there three or four hours,—he would follow him. Where? To York Place, of course: he was nearly certain of finding him at York Place.

“Have you any idea of where Mr. Archibald Douglas is gone to?” he asked the man at last.

"No, sir."

Osborne hesitated.

"Do you think he is gone to York Place?"

"I don't know, sir. He sent a note there by a messenger, after he came in," the man answered.

He was gone there, then. He had sent the note to tell Helen he was in London, and would be over with her presently. Osborne went to a table, on which a portable writing-case lay open, and taking up a pen and some paper, wrote a few lines :—

"DEAR ARCHIE,

"I took it into my head to come by the train after the one you left by ; the reason I'll explain when we meet. I am going in search of you, and if I don't find you, I'll come back here ; so if you come in, don't go out until you see me.

"Yours, ever truly,

"H. OSBORNE."

He threw the letter on the table, and went away. As soon as he turned the corner of the street, the servant walked up stairs, and

opening the carelessly-closed envelope, made himself master of the contents; by which move he learned nothing, except the name of the visitor—a name he was already familiar with, through Frederick Osborne.

Helen Douglas was sitting alone in the drawing-room at York Place, Lady Mackenzie having gone with some friends to a concert, to which Helen had refused to go, on the plea of a headache. The room was full of subdued gaslight, Helen having desired it to be moderated, because it hurt her eyes. She was half sitting, half reclining, on a corner of a sofa, with her head leaning against its stuffed arm.

It was partly true about the headache: her head did annoy her, although it did not exactly ache. It was rather that dull, heavy weariness which acts on the brain when the mind is anxious; and Helen's mind was very anxious just then about Archie Douglas. She had not been satisfied with his conduct and manner since he came to London. He had been tolerably civil and attentive to her, but no more than that. His visits had been

frequent, but uncertain. If he came in, she could not feel sure but that it was to tell her he only came for an hour or so, as he was going somewhere else, and that somewhere else was nearly always coupled with the name of Frederick Osborne. She was getting sick of Frederick Osborne.

It was in vain Lady Mackenzie tried to make Archie's visits special visits, and not cousinly attentions; Archie rebelled, and would not have it so. As we have seen once already, he even rebelled openly to Lady Mackenzie's face, and Lady Mackenzie had told Helen. Then had come his home journey, suddenly taken, without a word of farewell, only a careless message sent through his father.

"Would he have left Grace Clifford in that way?" Helen thought. "Yes, he would: he had come to London from Stedleigh without once seeing her for a whole week before he left;" Helen felt sure of that, and there was some consolation in it: but the crowning of Archie's delinquencies—the drop which had filled up the cup of Helen's anger and

fear, was the letter he had sent by the messenger from the hotel, on his arrival in Jermyn Street.

Mr. Douglas had called for a minute in the morning, and told her he had got a letter, that required him to go to Stedleigh on some urgent business; but that he had left a note for Archie, telling him he would be expected in York Place in the evening. There was an invitation for them to dine at Sir George Osborne's. He had declined on his own behalf, and said his son was out of town. Helen had stayed in the house all the afterpart of the day, not knowing what time Archie would come, as it must depend on which train he left Stedleigh by; but Archie had never come at all.

About seven o'clock, a note from him reached her, to say he was sorry he could not run up to see her for a moment; but he had found an invitation from Sir George Osborne awaiting him at the hotel, and he had scarcely time to dress and get out to Prince's Gate. However, he would call early to-morrow.

Helen crumpled up the letter, threw it

under the grate, and stayed at home from the concert.

“Osborne ! Osborne !” that name was for ever coming between her and Archie. He was out now at Prince’s Gate, sunning himself in the pretty smiles of Lady Osborne, while she sat solitary in York Place, with her small bit of love for him, and her great bit of ambition, struggling together in humiliation and anger.

It was that bit of love, small though it was, that made her hold on to Archie. The ambition would not have been enough of itself ; she could have satisfied that another way. She was wise enough to know she could have lured Harry away from Marion, had she been so minded, but she had never troubled herself to do it ; at least, not to any great extent. Vanity, and her love of admiration, idleness, and a spirit of mischief, all combined, had led her to draw him out of the water just a little now and then, and throw him back the next moment, but she had not done even that, until she saw he nibbled the hook without a bait on it. Harry

was a better match than Archie, and Helen would not have allowed Marion to stand in her way, only for that small bit of love.

She lay there thinking of him, handsome, daring, noble-hearted : and then as she thought of Harry Osborne, she shrugged her shoulders under her blue silk dress, as she had shrugged them before under her dressing-gown at Inchcauldie ; and even while she shrugged them, Harry himself stood in the drawing-room door, looking at her, as the soft gaslight fell on her closed eyes, and golden hair.

“Mr. Osborne,” the servant announced.

Helen started up at the name, expecting to see Frederick, and met Harry face to face.

“I am surprised to find you alone, Miss Douglas,” Osborne said as she gave him her hand ; “I expected to meet Archie here.”

“And I am surprised to see you at all, Mr. Osborne : I had no idea of your coming to London,” she answered, without noticing the observation about Archie.

She had coloured when she saw him, but it was nothing more than a flush of surprise,



heightened, perhaps, by her consciousness of the shoulder shrugging.

"I had not the least intention of coming to London myself at two o'clock to-day, Miss Douglas," he said as he sat down by her on the sofa.

He had hesitated a moment between the sofa and a chair, but on second thoughts yielded to the temptation, and selected the sofa.

"Then you came on some pressing business, I suppose?" she said interrogatively.

"Yes," he answered with his brain in a whirl, yet all the time conscious that he must not tell Helen what the business was. She observed his reticence.

"About your settlements, I dare say?" she said, putting in the probe.

It hurt him, as she knew it would.

"Yes, about the settlements," he replied, glancing uneasily at the gaslights, and then at the ornaments on the mantel-piece.

"How are they all at Stedleigh? Is Marion well, and Mrs. Douglas?"

"Quite well."

There was a minute's silence. Helen played with her bracelet, and Osborne sat watching her dropped eyelids. There was something delicious in sitting by her there in the still room. He felt as if he could sit for ever looking at her, and seeing nothing else, and wished he could only float down the river of life with Helen always by his side. He had been drifting idly since she left Stedleigh; what if she, too, was drifting, and that the time had come when they were to drift together?

The silence was very pleasant; it was a dreamy, lover-like silence, and he dreaded to break it. He was still sitting watching Helen, and she was still twisting her bracelet round and round, when it came unfastened in her hand.

"How awkward I am!" she said with a low laugh, attempting to fasten it on again.

The silence was broken, but Osborne's senses had not quite come back.

"Allow me," he said, eagerly catching at her wrist, and trying to close the clasp.

His fingers trembled over the wrist he held in his hand, trembled like a woman's.

"I can't manage it, I fear."

"I hope I have not broken it; I should not like to break it. It was Marion's present when I was leaving Stedleigh."

Marion—her name reminded him of his engagement, and the thought came across him like a breath of cold air.

"There, I have done it," he said, letting her wrist drop from his hand. "I think it is time to go. I must find my way back to the hotel; Archie may be there by this time."

He rose, and Helen rose likewise.

"Why are you going so soon?" she asked. "It is very cruel of you to run off without saying six words to me?"

She looked up and smiled—a pretty bewitching smile.

"I thought, perhaps, you were tired of me, and wished to be alone."

"No, indeed; I was very desolate when you came in, and ill with a headache too.

You have half chased it away ; why not wait until you complete the cure ?”

The demon of coquetry had hold of her, and led her to twist that poor fool about, like a cockchafer on a pin. Osborne felt he ought to go away, but he could not. It was a hard strait—who can blame him ? Of those two, Helen was certainly the worst sinner against Marion. The worst, because she was the coolest and the calmest. The worst, because her luring smiles were only sunbeams on ice, while Osborne’s heart was all on fire.

They stood on the hearth-rug, Helen’s foot just resting on the edge of it, and Osborne near her, leaning against the mantel-piece.

“ I wish you could cure my headache, Miss Douglas, if I have cured yours. Do you ever feel head weary and heart weary ?” he asked.

“ Yes, sometimes ; we are all more or less weary, I believe.”

“ And then we feel life a burthen.”

“ You should not talk in that way, Mr.

Osborne, with all your glowing prospects and happy future before you."

"I wish it was half as happy as yours."

"How do you know mine will be happy?"

"It ought to be."

She shook her head.

"Sometimes our happiness lies in the hands of other people," she answered, and she thought of how hers lay in the hands of Archie Douglas.

What did she mean? Was her happiness in the power of another, and if so, who was that other? The thought which had crept over Osborne in the railway train came stealing back again, bringing with it an almost irresistible temptation.

Why should a rash word spoken in the heat of youth, before he had a fair trial in the world, stand between him and the woman that was all in all to him? Would he be happy if he married Marion?—surely not. Would he be likely to make Marion happy either, with that stronger love darkening his heart to her? Let him flee from the danger before it becomes too much for him.

"Miss Douglas, I must go. I have some matters to arrange in London to night that I I had forgotten."

He made a step forward, and held out his hand.

"Ah, you put your business before your friends," she said. "But perhaps you do not consider me a friend?"

"You are a thousand times more to me than a friend," he answered, holding the hand she gave, tightly clasped in his.

The blood rushed up into her face. His earnestness startled her.

"Then why do you go?" she asked, not exactly knowing what she said at the moment.

"Because I must go—because I ought to go, for if I stay here I shall say something rash."

He half dropped her hand, and caught it again. What was the use of staying his words? he had said too much already. Why not say the rest? and he did say it, speaking eagerly, hotly, rapidly, holding Helen's hand all the time.

"Mr. Osborne, this must not be," she said, when he had done speaking, and paused for breath. "We cannot renew this subject again; and I must hear no more of it now."

She drew away her hand, and moved back from him.

"Why not?" he asked, losing sight of the reason, above all others, why they should not speak of it.

"Because you are engaged to my cousin."

"Is that your only reason? Tell me, truly, is that your only reason?"

Helen hesitated. Should she say no, and so end the matter at once; or should she still keep her power over him, and be able to whistle him back if she pleased. She decided on the latter.

"Surely that is sufficient reason," she said, taking care that the evasive answer should be such as to bind her to nothing.

The reply came to Osborne as fresh fuel to a blazing fire. Every discretion was forgotten. His promise to Marion, his father's indignation, and all that had stayed him hitherto,

were thrown to the winds. The floodgates of passion were opened wide, and the waters which had been kept back came rushing in. He followed Helen round the table, and threw his arm about her waist.

"That is no answer at all," he said, "or, rather, it is answer enough."

She tried to twist herself loose from his embrace, but he held her tightly, and kissed her on the forehead and lips. He kissed her as a man kisses the woman he loves. He kissed her, because he thought she loved him. She drew her face away, and broke from his clasp.

"It is utter madness, utter wrong, utter folly," she said, laying her hand on the handle of the closed folding doors that separated the front and back drawing-rooms.

"I could not help it," he said, "they had no business to send me to London."

"Who sent you?"

"Marion did. It was she who worked all this, not me."

"You must go back to her and forget your rashness: you must, indeed."



"Do you wish me to go back, Helen?"

"Wishes have nothing to do with it. It is right you should go."

Evasion again. Nothing honest, nothing certain.

"Right! I have been trying to do right until I am weary of it. I shall not go back now."

"Where will you go then?"

"I don't know."

"You must not come here, you cannot come here. What would they say to me at Stedleigh?"

"This has not been your fault or mine, Helen. They sent me, and the temptation was more than I could resist."

He stepped over near to her again.

"No, no, you must go back to Stedleigh. Do not call here, even once again, I beg of you."

She opened the folding doors, and darted through, closing them after her. Osborne stood alone in the empty room, with his brain whirling round, and those snatched kisses on his lips.

He went down stairs, and out into the street. He could not return to Jermyn Street now, he must not meet Archie Douglas that night at least. He walked down into Oxford Street, and up Holborn, trying to see his way clearly, trying to see what step he should take next. Only one thing his mind was decided on; he would not go back to Stedleigh. They would be expecting him to-morrow, but he would not go. His coming to London at all had been an insane act; his seeing Helen was more so. He admitted that, as he walked along under the lamplight, but then it was Marion who had sent him. It was her hand and her words that had driven him on the rocks.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## HARRY AT FREDERICK OSBORNE'S CHAMBERS.

A LIGHT quick rain was falling as Archie Douglas and Frederick Osborne made their way from the dazzling gaslights in Lady Osborne's drawing-rooms, to the flagway in Princes Gate. It had not been raining long, for the pathway was scarcely wet; but the glimmering lamps shone dimly through the haze that had gathered before the shower, and the few foot passengers that hurried along the streets, as they drove into London, looked splashed and desolate.

The cab dropped Archie Douglas in Jer-

myn Street, and he went on past the sleepy porter, and entered the sitting-room where lights were burning as usual awaiting his return. His stick and gloves lay on the centre table just as he had left them, and beside them was the note which Harry Osborne had written before he went to York Place. Archie took it up and read it with surprise. What had brought Harry to London—and where was he? Not waiting for him at the hotel, as the note said he would be, if he failed to find him. Then again, where had he gone in search of him? To York Place, probably, or to Chancery Lane. If so, he had been in neither; and why did not Osborne return to the hotel?

Archie went down to the hall and roused the man in the arm-chair. No gentleman had been there since eight o'clock. A gentleman had called then, and gone away, saying he would return, but he had not done so. The man knew nothing further. Archie went up to his bed-room no wiser for his inquiries. He did not trouble himself long considering the subject, however. Harry had most likely,

gone to some theatre to while away the time, and had then got a bed elsewhere ; he would be in for breakfast, probably. That was Archie's solution of it.

Young men are so uncertain in their movements, that they never get into panics about one another. You call at Jones' chambers and find them locked up, and the master gone. Perhaps his laundress, if you happen to meet her creeping about the stairs, knows where he is gone to, perhaps she does not. No matter, you don't concern yourself, Jones will turn up in a day or two, or a week or two, and you think no more of him until you pounce upon him in the Strand, or he strolls into your room Archie took Harry's absence in this philosophical fashion. He had come up to London to have those two or three pleasant days Archie had tempted him with, and he would be at Jermyn Street in time for breakfast.

Without further consideration Douglas dismissed the matter, and went to bed, thinking of Grace Clifford and Lady Osborne—Grace with her loving tenderness and her welcoming

## 230 FREDERICK OSBORNE'S CHAMBERS.

kisses. He would like to introduce her to Lady Osborne; he would wish Lady Osborne to be a friend of Grace. Nay, more; he would wish Lady Osborne to be a friend of his own. He felt they could be friends in the best sense of the word, despite Frederick Osborne's sneering assertions that Platonism is a falsehood. He would like to talk to Lady Osborne about Grace; like to take counsel with her in his difficulty. She was one of those women whose manner gives promise of ear and sympathy for masculine troubles, although to say the truth she had but little of them in reality. She was the very woman of all others to deceive and snare such a nature as Archie Douglas's; a woman who, if he had not had his love for Grace to stand between him and folly, might have played with him with a velvet paw, and tossed him away again when she was tired of the game.

But all this time where is Harry Osborne? We who know the state of bewildered confusion of brain in which he had gone stumbling down Oxford Street and Holborn after



exclamation, as the occupant of the chair rose on his entrance.

"It is I Harry—don't you know me, Fred?"

"Know you! I had not time to see you. Where did you drop from?"

And the two cousins shook hands.

"I came up from Stedleigh by the half-past seven o'clock train. I have been sitting here two hours," Harry said, dropping into his seat again.

"You don't look well; are you tired, or hungry? Will you have something to eat?"

He did not feel hungry, although he had not eaten any dinner.

"Give me a glass of wine; I won't mind anything else."

"They are all well at The Cliff, I suppose?" Frederick observed, as he put the wine and two glasses on the table.

"All quite well," Harry answered, drawing over his chair, and filling a glass for himself, which he drained before he set it down.

"Then what on earth ails you? You look as dolorous as if you had come from a funeral and been left nothing in the will."



It was the moodiness that follows excitement, the recoil that succeeds action. Harry had done a rash and a wrong thing, and he was not happy about it. He was going to do something still more wrong and rash; something that was to follow up that first wrong and rashness, and he was still less happy about that. He had come to his cousin determined to tell him his condition, not because he wanted advice as to the course he should take, he had his mind made up with regard to that, but because he must have some one to speak to, some one to whom he could tell his mad love for Helen, and how he had struggled against the madness. It was not love for his cousin that drove him to Chancery Lane in order to make him a confidant, but the absolute want of any one to whom he could open his mind.

Archie Douglas had been his chosen friend at Stedleigh, but he could not go to him with his tale of weakness, wrong, and desertion, when it was Archie's own sister that was to suffer by him. The probability was, that Archie would strike him, or fling him over

## 234    **FREDERICK OSBORNE'S CHAMBERS.**

the banisters, or do something else equally demonstrative, before his story was half told. Such weak men as Osborne deserve to be so treated, and Archie was the very man to do it if he came in his way. There was no one at Stedleigh likely to sympathise with or help him, and no one in London to whom he could turn save Frederick; therefore he had come to his cousin because there was no one else to speak to on the subject, and because he wanted him to act in the matter between him and his father.

Frederick Osborne saw well enough that there was something wrong. He had not been three minutes in Harry's company until he knew it, although he never for a moment suspected the reality; and as he lighted a cigar he asked Harry what had brought him to London.

"I came up to see Mr. Douglas," Osborne answered, not thinking himself at liberty to mention Archie's affairs, "but I found he had gone down to Stedleigh by an afternoon train."

"Then you may go back as you came. I

suppose you can settle your affairs there as well as here. When are we to have the wedding — and when do you return home again ?”

Osborne took another glass of wine, to strengthen himself for the explanation.

“I don’t mean to have any wedding, Fred, and I don’t mean to go back to Stedleigh either.”

“The devil you don’t! What’s all this about? You have quarrelled with Miss Douglas I suppose?”

“No, I can’t marry her, that’s all, and I am going to run for it.”

“Harry, you are clean mad,” and Frederick thought so at the moment. “Don’t be a fool to throw away your luck.”

“I was deceived in my feelings about her, and thought I loved her, but I did not; and now——”

It is the common cry of a man who means to be a villain,—he was deceived in his feelings. Who had deceived him, not Marion, surely?

“And now what, Harry?”

"I can't marry her, and I won't."

"There is more than that," Frederick answered. "Why can't you marry her? there must be a reason for it."

Osborne had filled another glass, which he put to his lips, and emptied.

"Because I love some one else, since you must have it."

"Fiddlestick! Some girl without a penny I'll swear. You are a great ass, Harry. Excuse me on the score of our relationship, but you are a great ass."

"I don't want any woman's money, I did not think of Marion Douglas for her money."

"Of course not. Disinterestedness runs in the family. But still the love could not be very deep you know, when the first new face put an end to it. It was beauty versus landed interest. Who is the reigning favourite?"

Osborne made no answer. He hesitated to mention Helen's name, and his cousin's cutting tongue angered him.

"Had you a regular scene before you left

Stedleigh?" Frederick asked, seeing Harry chose to be silent as to his last question.

"They know nothing about it in Stedleigh yet. I want you to go down to my father. There will be a horrible blow up, and the sooner it is over the better."

"Then for God's sake go back, and bury all this nonsense. I tell you, you are not in your senses. You would be a monstrous fool to break off such a match. Look at the advantages you lose."

"Advantages be hanged," Harry said, filling a fresh glass.

"It is you who ought to be hanged, for throwing them away. Tell me the whole story, man."

"There is not much of a story, Fred. I asked Marion to marry me, believing that I loved her; I did not love her, and I have been living in a kind of hell these six months. I can't stand it any longer. My father may say what he likes. The people who know me may say what they like."

"And they will say it, Harry. They will say you are a rascal."

Harry Osborne got up, and walked about the room.

"They will say nothing but the truth, I am a rascal. I have been a traitor, and half a rascal for these months. I can only be a whole rascal when the truth comes out."

He came over to the table, and put out his hand for the decanter.

"No, no," Frederick said, interposing, and removing it beyond his reach. "You have had wine enough, it is getting to your head. When the fumes go down, you will think better of this nonsense."

"I will not think better of it. I'll soil my soul with no more acting—no more lies, I'm sick of them."

"Will you be calm, and tell me what you want me to do, and what you mean me to do yourself?" Frederick said.

"I want you to see my father, and tell him I have battled against my want of love for Marion, and tried to the uttermost to keep my engagement with her; that even when I left Stedleigh I meant to go back, and keep

my promise, but that I cannot now do it. Do as I will I cannot keep it. It would only be more falseness, more perjury, more lies. Tell him I cannot marry Marion, because I love another woman."

He had restrained his excitement hitherto, but the wine was stirring it up fast, and the thought of Helen Douglas was renewing the whirl in his brain.

"Who is the woman?" Frederick Osborne asked.

Harry paused a moment in his walk, and looked at him.

"Helen Douglas."

There was a short silence, and no sound was heard, except the heavy step of Harry Osborne, as he began pacing the room again, backwards and forwards.

"Harry you must give this up," his cousin said, presently.

"No living soul will make me give it up now, Frederick."

"Did you see her since you came to London?"

"I did, I saw her and spoke to her."

"And she—"

"Never mind about her. I went to York Place to look for Archie Douglas, firmly believing I should find him with her. He was not there, Helen was alone, and in a mad moment I told her everything."

He paced the room more rapidly, thinking of that time which was only a moment to look back on, when he had held her in his arms, and pressed his kisses on her forehead and lips.

"What did she say, Harry?"

"She told me to go back to Stedleigh."

"So I tell you too. You will be sorry for this day's work, mind. What the mischief drove you up here in that woman's way?"

"Marion herself drove me. Come what will of it, it was she who sent me away from Stedleigh. I did not want to go, but she sent me."

There seemed a comfort to him in going over this, as if he thought Marion's innocent goodness to her brother, in urging his visit, in some way entitled him to lay a grain



of blame on her, and so lift it off himself.

"If you won't go back to Stedleigh, what will you do? You are not going to marry this other lady, I presume?"

Osborne reddened. "I don't know what I'll do, get a yacht probably, and run up the Mediterranean. I have thought of it more than once."

"Where?"

"At Stedleigh, when I used to be half beside myself, with that cursed promise hanging over me."

"Nonsense Harry, take my advice, and go back."

"I don't want advice. I did not come to you for advice, Frederick. What I came for, was to tell you a certain thing, and get you to tell my father, and Mr. Douglas, or any one you choose."

Frederick shook his head. "It's too delicate a piece of business for me to meddle in. Write a letter."

There was another silence, Osborne still walking up and down. Write a letter, that

was the very last thing he wished to do. It seemed more cool deliberate villany to write a letter, than to send an ambassador. Besides, what could he say? He could not sit down and pen a cold announcement of his change of feelings, neither could he write in a tone of humble self-abasement, admitting himself a rascal, as Frederick had said people would say he was. The more he thought it over, the more he shrank from writing. He went across the room, and sat down by his cousin.

"I don't know what to say in a letter; besides, a letter would shock my father more than a visit from you. Come, Frederick, for friendship's sake, and for old College days, you will do this for me."

Osborne hesitated. "I'll do it on one condition."

"What condition?"

"That you take to-morrow to think of it. I can't go on this wild goose chase till you have had time to reflect. You are half addled between the wine you drank, and whatever that girl has said to you."

"They'll expect me at Stedleigh to-morrow."

"Let them, they'll think you have stayed another night. There is nothing so wonderful in that; and as to Archie Douglas, we will keep out of his way. We would have the deuce's own row if he met you.

"He must know it sometime."

"Yes, I dare say; but I don't choose you to meet on my ground. I'll have no squabbling here. For my own part I hate quarrelling; I don't think the whole world is worth fighting for, for all the time we have to enjoy it," Frederick said, lighting another cigar.

Harry made no reply.

"You had better go to bed, my boy; I'll smoke and doze here till morning, and you can have my bed if you like," Frederick observed, after a few minutes' puffing at his cigar.

"It would be no use, I could not sleep to-night, Fred."

"Aye, like Macbeth, you have thoughts that murder sleep."

They sat together talking until the cigar

was finished ; and then, at Harry's request, Frederick Osborne rose to go to his room.

"You must not touch any more wine mind ; you have had enough," he said, as he prepared to leave Harry to himself. "I'll expect to find you more rational to-morrow."

"I have made up my mind, and I'll stick to it. I told Helen I would not go back to Stedleigh and I won't.

'How happy could I be with either,  
Were t'other dear charmer away.'—

Frederick hummed, as he lighted his candle, "By Jove, it's an old saying that comes true over and over again every day, that there's a woman at the bottom of all mischief. I keep myself clear of such craft, but you have two of them. There must be something peculiar in the Stedleigh air, for Archie Douglas has got three."

"There you are, Frederick, jibeing again. What do you mean by Douglas having three !"

"I mean he has three ladies on hands at once. Miss Douglas—the young lady who is troubling you at present—and Miss Clifford,

the parson's little daughter ; he thinks I don't know that, because he never told me with his lips. Bless his soul, he tells me twenty times a day without knowing it," and Frederick Osborne laughed.

" Miss Douglas does not care a fig about Archie," Harry said, reddening.

" I suppose not ; I thought she did : but I dare say she told you differently."

" And who is the third lady ?" Harry asked, keeping down his anger, and seeming not to notice his cousin's last observation.

" Lady Osborne. Archie thinks there's not so handsome, and so delightful a woman in the world as her ladyship. I would not say but that the fair Grace would go to the wall, if my pretty aunt became a widow."

" She would never marry Douglas, even if she did."

" You may say that, Harry. Catch her at it ; she would fly for higher quarry. At present they are friends of the first water : he is going somewhere with her and Miss Douglas to-morrow : he is to prepare his cousin in the morning, and Lady Osborne is to call for her,

and Lady Mackenzie, who goes' as chaperon to the younger lady. It's very nice to sit by and watch the games that are playing round us in this great city."

"Poor Archie will get into trouble about Grace, I'm afraid. As to Lady Osborne, that's all nonsense," Harry said, as he shook hands with his cousin, and bade him good-night.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## FREDERICK OSBORNE AT THE CLIFF.

AT two o'clock the day but one following the conversation between Harry and his cousin, the latter was seated in the drawing-room at The Cliff, with the Admiral and Miss Osborne.

He had come there on that special mission from Harry, which they had talked about in Chancery Lane. His cousin had taken the day to consider the subject, as he had promised he would ; but, at the end of the time he had his mind as firmly fixed on the course he had determined on as ever.

If Helen Douglas had acted honestly in the matter ; if she had said at once openly and fairly that she did not love him, that he owed it to Marion to keep his word with her, and he ought to return to Stedleigh, as though this folly had never been thought of, the probability is he would have obeyed her : but she did not do this. She said the last, without saying the first ; and that last was far worse than if she had said neither ; far worse than if she had walked out of the room in silence and anger. It gave him hope, gave him courage to defy the opinion of the world, to brave his father's wrath, and to desert the woman he had promised to marry.

Once the mad delusion entered his brain that Helen loved him, it was all over with Marion. It is very fine to talk of duty and honor, and all that, sitting by the fireside, with cool brains and cool hearts. People may tell me I ought to have made Osborne quench his love, and follow his duty. I can only answer that the world does not always do as it ought to do, but as it chooses to do, and as I am writing a story about



men and women, who are expected to act as other men and women about us every day do, I must let Osborne have his own way as to his marriage. Martyred brides, and martyred bridegrooms, are very nice in novels, but in real life they rarely exist. I do not believe that all the marriages the registrar enters each year, are the result of violent love fits. Neither do I believe one in a hundred is carried out only because the parties promised. The promise may be given for love, or for reasons apart from love, no matter which, it is fulfilled because the reason for making it still exists, as a reason for keeping it. Let the reason cease to exist, and where is the promise? In all this I do not mean to excuse Harry Osborne. He is no special favourite of mine, and he is not my hero. But what I do mean is, that he acted as one fourth of the world would have acted in his place.

Men are generally what women make them, and Osborne weak, vacillating, and very much in love, was just what Helen Douglas made him. A word from her,

spoken in calm kindness would have sent him back to Stedleigh, but she would not speak such a word. And now Harry has fled away to Dover, where he sits upon the cliffs, watching the sea rolling, and the French boats coming in, not quite certain whether he will cross over to France, or buy the yacht he spoke of, and run up the Mediterranean. Frederick Osborne at the same time is sitting in the Admiral's drawing-room, waiting to tell his story.

It was not a pleasant story, and he was considering the best way of beginning it. If he had been talking to Archie Douglas, or any other man near his own age, he could have told it at once without difficulty. Young men's anger is not dangerous to themselves, but the anger of old men is different. Excitement does not agree with a veteran over seventy, and Frederick Osborne to do him justice, did not like the thoughts of exciting his uncle. He liked the Admiral far better than he liked Sir George. Far better indeed than he liked most people. He looked upon him as a kind of good natured ass, whose

long sojourn in the world, had not served to open his eyes one quarter as wide as his own had been opened, in far less than half the time. But he considered him an amiable specimen of the donkey tribe; a man in whom there was no guile, and Frederick was not prone to believe in the want of guile in many people. So all things considered, the Admiral stood rather high in the opinion of the young cynic.

"I was surprised to see you Fred," the Admiral said, as soon as the first expressions of welcome, and astonishment were over, and Osborne had seated himself beside his uncle. "You don't generally leave London this time of the year. It's very full now I suppose?"

"Very full, the yearly hunt for coronets and strawberry leaves has begun again. Such lots of pretty women as one sees in the park now."

"You have an eye for pretty women my boy. It was always an Osborne weakness," the Admiral said.

"My uncle George is a standing proof of

that," Frederick answered with a shrug and a smile.

"That was a foolish business, a very foolish business," the Admiral rejoined shaking his head. "But how are they. Do you see them often?"

"Very often, they are quite well. Her ladyship flirts, and admires herself in the glass, and Sir George sleeps, and knows nothing about it."

"Come you have a severe tongue Fred. Harry called there I suppose. You saw him of course?"

"Yes, he was at my chambers the night before last, and we breakfasted together yesterday morning."

"He was to have been back last night," Miss Osborne said; "and he has neither come nor written."

"He'll be down to-night, perhaps," the Admiral suggested. "London is an enticing place just now, and, I dare say, he and Archie are enjoying it together."

"I have not seen Douglas to-day or yesterday," Frederick said, avoiding a direct reply.

"Harry did though, I suppose."

"I believe not," Osborne answered.

Something in his voice struck Miss Osborne. Her ear, like all feminine ears, was quick in detecting tones.

"Why do you believe not, Frederick?" she asked; "he went up to see Archie."

She had a suspicion that something was not right. The Admiral was looking out of the window, watching the sea. It was a calm summer sea, showing blue or green, according as the sun fell upon it.

"I will tell you why in a moment; but I have a little business to transact with my uncle."

"You came on business, then," the Admiral said, turning his head to listen, unsuspecting of what was coming.

"I came with a message from Harry. He wants you to get him a yacht, and let him go for a cruise in the Mediterranean."

"The devil he does. What does the fellow mean, and he going to be married in three weeks? Who goes with him? Archie Douglas?"

Miss Osborne sat with her hands clasped in her lap. She gave one glance at Frederick. Frederick looked back at her, and the look told all that he had to say.

"Archie knows nothing about it. The fact is, Harry wants his marriage deferred."

"I'll have no such nonsense. It has been put off long enough already. What is it he wants it deferred for?"

"Well, deferred is all I hope it will be ultimately, uncle; but the truth is, he wants to get out of it altogether."

If an earthquake had tumbled the house about his ears, the Admiral could not have been more astonished.

"He's a rascal! a confounded rascal!" he said, getting on his feet, in the strength of his anger, while his face flushed crimson, and the rush of blood made the veins of his forehead stand out like cords.

Miss Osborne was frightened. She got up and put her hand on her father's shoulder, to try to get him into his seat again.

"I told him he was a rascal, uncle, and he admitted it," Osborne said, coolly; thinking

coolness was the best way to quiet the old man's excitement: and he was right. The cold, calm tones of Frederick's voice operated so far on him, that he yielded to the pressure of his daughter's hand, and resumed his chair.

"I'll go after him, wherever he is. I'll bring him back, and marry him, whether he likes it or not. What a villanous notion it was to walk off in this coldblooded way, and ask for a yacht, in order to go and amuse himself!"

"There is no use in your following him, uncle. I never saw a fellow who had his mind more fully made up."

"What the mischief is it all about? I don't understand it! I'll tell you what—he is my own son, but he deserves to be horse-whipped!"

"Where is he now?" Miss Osborne asked.

"That's more than I know. He left me last night, saying he would go off somewhere; he did not know where, but that I'd find a letter from him in Chancery Lane, to-morrow, telling me where to write."

"How am I to look Margaret Douglas in the face, or Marion, or her father? He must give some reason for this. What has he to say for himself?"

"Just this: that he won't marry Miss Douglas, because he loves her cousin Helen."

The Admiral's anger flashed out again.

"That only makes matters worse. That only makes his rascality the greater. He'll not come here—he'll not set foot in this house; and as for a yacht, I'll not give him a penny for that, or anything else!"

Miss Osborne and Frederick took no notice of this threat. They knew the old man said a great deal more when he was angry, than ever he did when he cooled, and that there was no danger of Harry's faults being followed by such extreme punishment.

"Harry saw Miss Douglas since he went to London, I suppose?" Miss Osborne said.

"He did, and made a clean breast of it."

"She has made him make a nice fool of himself!" the Admiral observed. "Did he state what she said?"



"No, except that she desired him to go back to Stedleigh."

"Pooh! she ought to have ordered him out of the house. Men don't regard such flimsy discouragement as that."

"Women like to hear a fellow telling them he loves them, and all that sort of thing," Frederick answered, with one of his cynical smiles. "It is pleasant oil to their vanity."

"—— all such nonsense!" the Admiral said, impatiently. "If that girl had been true blue, she would have sent him about his business in five minutes."

"Did she promise to marry him?" Miss Osborne asked, who was suspicious of Helen, and had been witness to more than one of her half-concealed flirtations with her brother.

"He solemnly assured me not. She would not even allow him to call again in York Place."

"Well, that is something," the Admiral rejoined. "It looks as if she meant to act fairly."

Frederick Osborne said nothing: he thought

the ultimate acting depended on circumstances but he was not going to say so much to his uncle.

“When are you going up to town again?” Miss Osborne asked.

“I must be off to-night. I hold a brief in a case that’s to be on to-morrow.”

That was true. Frederick had actually got a brief—the first promise of the opening of the golden gates.

“I must get the brougham round and go to Stedleigh, to talk this affair over with Mr. Douglas,” the Admiral observed, still full of his thoughts about what he called his son’s rascally behaviour.

“Send Frederick for him ; it would be better to see him here,” Miss Osborne suggested, fearing her father’s indiscreet passion would lead him to burst out with the matter to Mrs. Douglas or Marion herself.

The Admiral hesitated but consented at last, and Osborne set out to walk to Stedleigh. Miss Osborne accompanied him to the gate.

“Do you really not know where Harry is?” she asked, as they went along.

"I do not, upon my honour. When he left me last night he said he did not know himself where to turn his face."

"He is not lingering about London watching Miss Douglas, is he? I suspect that girl, Frederick."

"So do I, she is a clipper. She has her eye on Archie Douglas, or any one else she can snap."

"Do you think she cares for Archie?"

"I do, more than she cares for any one, but that's not much."

"Mr. Douglas and I thought that everything was not right with Harry for some time past, but we thought it wisest to say nothing. You, of course, who had no suspicion, must have been surprised."

"Utterly; I fancied all was going on smoothly. It seemed slow, but I never suspected any upset. Harry is a great fool to throw away his luck."

Miss Osborne made no answer, and they walked on in silence until they reached the gate, when she held out her hand to Frederick.

"I am not a woman to throw away words or thanks, but I am deeply obliged to you for the part you have taken in this, Frederick. You have acted kindly in coming to us, and I am sure you did all you could to talk Harry into reason."

"I did, indeed, Charlotte. I refused to come down here until he took a whole day to think of it; and I tell you fairly, there's no use in trying to patch up that marriage, for he won't marry the girl."

Osborne lingered by the gate, and his cousin was a moment before she spoke.

"It might be better for you to give Mr. Douglas an idea of what my father wants to see him about."

"As you like. It might take the edge off the meeting."

And Frederick went on to Stedleigh.

It was a strange business this in which Osborne suddenly found himself mixed up. He was not given to trouble himself about people's affairs, and now he was the centre of as pretty a tangled family matter as need be. However, the worst of it was over in his

interview with his uncle. He had dreaded that, but he had got through it tolerably well.

The part Miss Osborne assigned him with Mr. Douglas was not nearly so difficult. Mr. Douglas had a quiet, unexcited manner with him, that made an approach to unpleasant business less hazardous than it was with the Admiral, and it was with no feeling of special uneasiness that he found himself crossing the lawn at Stedleigh, and making towards the house.

Mrs. Douglas and Marion were in the drawing-room, and received their visitor with some surprise.

"I wanted to see Mr. Douglas," he said as he shook hands. "My uncle has sent me with a message to him."

"I must send in search of him, then," Mrs. Douglas said. "I don't know where he is." And she rang the bell.

"Never mind, Mrs. Douglas, I'll go myself. He is in the grounds, I suppose."

"Oh, no, you must sit with us ladies, and tell us news. Travellers are always expected to have news."

A servant entered in answer to the bell.

"Go in search of your master, and tell him Mr. Frederick Osborne wishes to see him," and Osborne was obliged to remain.

"I don't know that I have any particular news, Mrs. Douglas," he said in answer to her remark, "except that I saw the Chancellor yesterday, and he is in excellent health. You are not interested in that, I suppose?"

"Not much," she said, laughing.<sup>1</sup>

"I had the honour of staring him out of countenance for two hours. Indeed, I may say it's my daily occupation now."

"You have been called to the bar we heard, Mr. Osborne," Marion said, laying down the eternal wool work that Helen Douglas used to quarrel with.

She was dying to ask about Harry, but could not summon courage. Her stepmother, however, took her out of the difficulty.

"Harry came down with you, I presume? He was to have been here last night."

"London is a difficult place to leave, once you get there," he said, leaving the question unanswered.

"I should think it was. But I wonder Harry did not come over with you to-day."

"He is not at The Cliff, Mrs. Douglas," Osborne replied, looking at his boots.

She looked surprised. Surprised and uneasy, Osborne thought.

"Archie has made him stay. Is that it, Mr. Osborne?" Marion asked.

"I have not seen your brother these two days, Miss Douglas," he said, while he was thinking she was rather a nice girl, and would certainly be worth taking, with such a property as Stedleigh.

"Mr. Osborne, how do you do? I am glad to see you at Stedleigh," Mr. Douglas said, entering the drawing-room, and saving Frederick from further embarrassing questions.

"Thank you, Mr. Douglas, I am glad to see Stedleigh once again myself. I had a spare day, and I just ran down to see my uncle. He sent me here to you, as he wishes to see you at The Cliff."

Mrs. Douglas and Marion had attached no importance to Osborne's remark that he had

a message from his uncle to Mr. Douglas, but now there seemed to be a mystery about it. The message was not told openly, only that the Admiral wanted to see his friend, and they both connected it with Harry. He had not come from London, and he had not written. A vague fear seized them at the same moment, but it was a very different fear in the mind of each. Marion dreaded illness or accident, Mrs. Douglas something else nearer the truth.

As the words fell from Osborne's lips, Marion looked up with a quick, anxious glance.

"Is there anything the matter?" her step-mother inquired, very anxious too, but more bold to question.

"Oh, no, a mere matter of business, on which my uncle wants to consult Mr. Douglas."

"Is there anything wrong about Harry?"

"The matter does not concern Harry. It is an affair of the Admiral's about which I came from London."

This was not true of course, but Osborne



consoled himself by thinking it was no harm to tell a fib to a woman; it saved them from bothering.

"Did Harry come down with you?" Mrs. Douglas asked.

"No; he finds London pleasant, I suppose."

"I daresay Archie and he are making the best they can of their time."

Osborne was looking about for his gloves, and did not seem to hear the remark. He had parried a similar one from Mrs. Douglas a minute before, and he evaded this altogether.

"There is nothing wrong at The Cliff, I hope?" Mr. Douglas said, as he and Osborne went over the lawn.

"Not exactly; they are well and all that, but the Admiral wants to speak to you on a very particular matter."

"You said you came from London on this business, Mr. Osborne. What is it?" Mr. Douglas asked, in quiet questioning tones.

"Well, the truth is, the business is about

Harry, although I did not like to say so before the ladies. Harry has been showing himself a bit of a weathercock, and the Admiral is angry."

"How so?"

"He wants his marriage deferred, or, rather——" and Osborne stopped.

"Put an end to altogether—is that it?" Mr. Douglas asked, facing round on his companion.

"I am very sorry to say that is it, Mr. Douglas," Frederick Osborne answered.

"And I am sorry to say I ever gave my consent to my daughter's marriage with him, although it was rather because it was pressed upon me by the Admiral than because I wished it."

He could not explain the reason, but the assertion was true nevertheless, although Osborne did not believe it. He had given his consent to Marion's marriage because he could not help it; and he was glad to fall back on his hesitation now, to soothe his pride under the slight Harry Osborne had put on her.

"Harry's conduct has been most unaccountable," Frederick observed.

"How long has he been thinking of this, Mr. Osborne?" Mr. Douglas asked.

"A good while. I should think ever since he saw Miss Douglas in Scotland, but the impulse on which he acted at the last, was sudden."

"Miss Douglas, what has she to do with it?"

"I forgot to explain that it was love for her which led Harry to break off the marriage."

Mr. Douglas was silent a moment.

"Is she going to marry him?" he asked.

"Harry says not," Osborne answered, not thinking it wise from sundry suspicions he was indulging, to give a more positive reply. "He spoke to her, and I believe she did not—"

"Encourage him—"

"Well, she did not accept him."

Osborne's was a qualified denial of Helen's treason, to say the least of it, but Mr.

Douglas questioned him no further, and they walked on to The Cliff in silence. Miss Osborne met them at the door.

"My father is in the drawing-room, Mr. Douglas," she said, without attempting to touch on the subject which had brought him there, and then making way for him to pass, she went out and walked round the flower beds with Frederick Osborne.

"Douglas, I am ashamed to look you in the face," the Admiral said, holding out his hand to his visitor.

"It has not been your fault, Admiral," Mr. Douglas answered, taking his offered hand.

"It has been all Harry's. He is a confounded cold blooded rascal, to go off in such a way," the old man said, venting his wrath by scattering hard names upon the son that he dearly loved, in spite of his errors. "But take a chair Douglas, take a chair, while we talk of his villanous behaviour."

"There is no use in your working yourself up my good friend. It can't be helped now ;

no anger of yours or mine can help it. I only regret I ever gave my consent to the marriage."

"But it can be helped. I'll bring him back, as surely as the sun shines, and make him fulfil his promise."

"You shall do nothing of the kind. Marion will find her loss easier to bear than the tie of a husband who was tired of her before he married her," Mr. Douglas answered.

"It has all come of a ridiculous fancy he has got in his head that he loves some one else, no other in fact, than Miss Douglas of Inchcauldie."

"That is madness, she can have no idea of him," Mr. Douglas said, more as if replying to his own thoughts, than answering the Admiral.

"Of course it's madness," the old man rejoined, holding out his snuff-box to his friend as usual. "You must run up to London, Douglas, and bring him to his senses. I wanted to go, but Charlotte won't let me."

"Charlotte is quite right, you are not stout enough to be journeying about; as to my going, that is entirely out of the question. I would not give my consent now, if he came back to ask it. It shall never be said I threw my daughter at any man's head."

"That is false pride, Douglas. My son made a promise, and he is bound in honour to keep it."

"Honour has had a sorry effect in binding him, Osborne."

"But I say it shall bind him."

"Nothing shall bind me to give him Marion. He has broken his engagement now, and he shall never renew it again. Take my advice, and let him go his own way, for he will go in spite of you."

"You are angry, Douglas, and you have a right to be angry. I can say nothing for him, though he is my own son, I can say nothing for him."

"I am not angry, Admiral, at least I am not angry with you," Mr. Douglas said, getting up from his chair. "As to Harry

and me, you need not try to mend matters between us, for they are past mending."

He was standing in the middle of the room, with his eyes fixed on the sea, and that hard, cold, resolute look in them, against which the Admiral knew of old there was no appeal. He would not give his consent to Marion's marriage, even if he drew Harry back to the point, and who could blame him. What father would trust his daughter's happiness in the hands of such a man as Harry Osborne? It would not be just to Marion to allow her to risk her future, by marrying him, and Mr. Douglas, although he did not love his daughter, resolved to be just to her, more particularly when that justice concerned a marriage to which he had given an unwilling consent.

"Let it be so then, Mr. Douglas. Let him go to the devil his own way, only he shall never set foot in my house. I told Charlotte that, and I tell you too. He shall neither have money nor countenance from me," the Admiral said angrily, as he bade Mr. Douglas good bye at the hall door, and

Mr. Douglas went home to Stedleigh with a thorn rankling in his side.

His daughter contemned and cast aside—his daughter, whom any man in the county might be proud to win.



## CHAPTER XV.

## NEVER AGAIN.

MR. DOUGLAS stood in the library at Stedleigh, telling his wife the tale of Harry Osborne's broken faith. It was only a few months since he had sat with Harry's father in that very room, giving an unwilling ear to his son's proposal to marry Marion. He remembered how that proposal had dashed through his more than half formed hope, that she might never marry, and yet now, when events over which he had no control, events, occurring without his agency or desire, had worked a termination to that marriage, he was not satisfied.

His daughter's youth ebbing away without a touch of the grand passion to disturb its serenity, or her father's wishes, and Stedleigh slipping over to Archie, or Archie's son, a gift from his sister's affection was one thing; but Marion, rejected and contemned, flung back as it were in his teeth, was another.

Although Mr. Douglas had never loved her much, and never forgiven her fault of sex, hard as he was, and cold as he was, he could not help feeling for the position in which Harry's falseness and fickleness had placed her. His own pride was touched by it too. Only he and his wife discussing it in cautious tones, with closed doors, and the family at The Cliff knew it then; but in less than twenty-four hours, all Stedleigh would have it on their lips. Talking gossips would shake their heads over it, Mr. Reddington would hear it the Grove, and Mr. Hamilton would shrug his shoulders when it reached the Priory, shrug his shoulders and rejoice; for had not Mr. Hamilton been his enemy for more than twenty years? That old

enmity, so strong on Mr. Douglas's part, and despite his belief to the contrary, so weak on Mr. Hamilton's, was not to be laid aside or forgotten. On the contrary, it was to be perpetuated, and strengthened, by a political contest.

It was that very political contest which had brought him in such haste from London, although he had not thought fit to explain so much to any of his family. Mr. Reddington heard a rumour of Mr. Brownlow's proposed resignation, and wrote to his friend to say he had better be on the spot, in order to meet any sudden move in the enemy's camp. On the spur of the intelligence he had come back to Stedleigh, and this trouble met him almost at the threshold. This trouble, which the little world of Stedleigh would be discussing to-morrow.

"If Harry had acted differently—if he had spoken out honestly to me, I would have broken off the marriage in a way that would save us from public gossip; as it stands now, the whole parish will be talking of us."

The story was told, but the sorest point

was touched last. Mr. Douglas still stood by the fire-place opposite his wife, who was leaning her hand on the library table, and looking up at her husband, her face white with dismay and dread. She had seen the shadow of it long before while Helen was at Stedleigh, and the fear had made her hesitate about Harry's journey to London, but the reality when it came, appalled her for Marion's sake.

Mr. Douglas's natural shrinking from the rude gossip of his neighbours did not affect her; that might come to her again, but now the thought uppermost in her mind was, how was she to tell Marion? How was she to go to her and shatter by a word all her trust in the false lover, who had vowed a vow he would not keep, who had left her without one word of warning, one word of explanation, telling her he would be back again, but who, instead, had fled, no one knew where.

Mrs. Douglas blamed Harry bitterly, blamed him severely—he had been weak, wrong, and treacherous; but there was another whom she blamed still more, and that other was Helen

Douglas. She had not been weak like Osborne, but, like him, she had been wrong and treacherous. It was her beauty, her false smiles and coquetry which had caused all this, and she rejoiced now that Archie did not love her. If he did she could not welcome her to Stedleigh or The Grange. She could not hold out her arms to her as she could to Grace Clifford. But through all this rush of thought the question came again.

"How am I to tell Marion, Archibald? How am I to tell her?"

"I cannot say, Margaret," her husband answered, "but you must tell her somehow. There is no one so fit as you."

She knew there was not, yet she shrunk from the task.

"Is there no other way? Could you not go after him? Could not the Admiral go after him, and try to bring him back to reason?—that is, if this girl has left him any reason back to—"

"It is quite impossible; I would not suffer the marriage to go on now. I would not throw my daughter at any man's head."

Mr. Douglas walked to the window and looked out, and then walked back to the fireplace.

"What am I to do?" Mrs. Douglas asked.

"Tell Marion at once; there is no use in delaying—she must be told," he answered.

A servant opened the library door.

"Mr. Reddington wants to see you, sir."

There was no denying him admittance, even if Mr. Douglas wished it, for he entered at the servant's back, fussy, wiry, and smiling as usual.

"Very warm, is it not? It was a hot drive from the Grove," he said, bustling up to the hearth where Mr. Douglas stood, while Mrs. Douglas, bowing assent to the observation, which had been addressed to her, turned and left the room.

The servant who had ushered in Mr. Reddington, was standing in the hall as she passed out of the library.

"Did Mrs. Reddington come, Traynor? Is she in the drawing-room?"

The man said not. Mr. Reddington had come alone. There was no one in the

drawing-room but Miss Douglas. She crossed the hall, and laid her hand doubtingly on the handle of the drawing-room door. Should she go in now and tell Marion, or should she put it off yet a little longer?

While she doubted and hesitated, while Traynor turned and watched her wonderingly, as he had already wondered at her colourless face, a hand was laid upon the handle at the opposite side. Mrs. Douglas let go her hold, and Marion, drawing the door open, appeared in the doorway.

"Oh! mamma, you frightened me," she said, starting; and then, laughing, stepped back into the room.

Mrs. Douglas followed her—the question of telling or not telling was decided.

"I thought I heard some one coming. Is there any one with papa?"

"Mr. Reddington and he are in the library."

"So it was Mr. Reddington that I heard? the door-bell rung, and I fancied it might be Harry."

. She was in the music-room when the bell

rang, which was at the back of the drawing-room, with a door of communication between, consequently she had been unable to catch a view of the arrival.

"I don't know what Mr. Reddington is always doing here, or why your father goes so often to the Grove," Mrs. Douglas said, to avoid making a direct answer to Marion's observation about Osborne.

But Marion's thoughts were running on Harry.

"Did papa say what they wanted with him at The Cliff, mamma?"

What was she to say to that question? Marion was standing at a small table busying herself with a bowl of flowers, in the centre of which she was placing a crimson rose that she had plucked on the terraces a little while before.

Mrs. Douglas's silence made her look up for a reply, and for the first time she observed the pale face that had puzzled the astute Traynor.

"What is the matter, mamma? Are you not well?"



"Yes, dear, quite well, only worried and annoyed."

"Was there bad news from The Cliff? Is there anything the matter with Harry?"

Illness, railway accidents, everything ran through her mind in that first moment of awakened uneasiness, except the thing that it really was. Mrs. Douglas read the fear in her face.

"Don't be frightened, Marion, dear. There is nothing the matter with him. He is not at The Cliff at all."

"You have heard something of him—where is he? Is he in London?" She flung down the rose, and, coming over to her stepmother, placed her hands on her arm—"Oh! mother, dear, do tell me where he is!"

"I do not know, but he has gone away from Stedleigh, and his father too."

"Gone away from Stedleigh?"

The words went ringing through her brain.

"What do you mean?" she asked, with a deadly whiteness in her face—"Is he not coming back again?"

"Marion, darling, try to be calm, and bear it. He is gone away from us, and I fear he will not come back again."

"Never again? Is it never again?" she questioned, as if scarcely able to realize the fact to herself.

"Never again!" Mrs. Douglas repeated, putting her arm round the poor girl's neck.

What a killing weight those words were. She did not scream nor cry, but she leant her head against her mother's shoulder, and moaned.

A moment before she had been listening for her lover's returning footsteps—flying to welcome his approach, and now she knew he was gone from her for ever, without a word of farewell, without a sentence to tell her they should never meet again.

She had been watching for him, waiting for him, while he had been flying away from her. She did not even know where. She would know the reason—she would hear it all, why he had left her so suddenly and so cruelly. She who had loved him as her own soul—

loved him far more than she loved her life ! If they had come to her to tell her he was ill or dying, she could have flown to him, sat by his side, and striven to bring him back to life. Ill or dying, she could have borne that. Death itself was better than the cold gulf that must flow between them now. The man who had been all in all to her but two short days ago, henceforth was to be less than nothing. The vows he had vowed in the past, were scattered to the winds. The vow he was to vow to her in the future, would never be uttered now.

How brightly the sun was shining upon her misery—glancing on the lake and the smooth lawn, and the terrace steps, where Marion had wandered awhile ago amongst the flowers, watching for Osborne's return. The beams came in through the open drawing-room windows, and shone upon her as she sat shrinking and shuddering by Mrs. Douglas on the sofa, her head still against her shoulder.

She must hear it all, she said, what was the use of dealing out torture to her by degrees ?

Let her have the whole truth, bad as it might be.

Harry had come to Stedleigh once to tell her he loved her, why had he not come to tell her that that love had ceased? She would not have held him to his promise if he had only been candid with her—he might have gone away free. She could have endured such an avowal better than the pain of this sudden wrench.

But perhaps he did it for the best; she did not wish to blame him. He might not have seen his way out of the difficulty by any other mode, or he might have acted from impulse. She would not believe that he had gone to London, not meaning to come back again. What Frederick Osborne said was true, she was sure it was true. Harry had done all he had done on the spur of sudden temptation. The kiss he gave her by the tree on the lawn at Stedleigh the day he parted her, had not been the Judas kiss of a man dyed with premeditated treachery. He had intended to come back again—he had intended to keep a promise which had grown bitter to fulfil.

She loved this man with her whole heart. She knew she should love him still in spite of all that had occurred. If he came to her to-morrow and asked her to forgive him, she would forgive him—freely forgive him, and welcome him back again.

It was not womanly, it was not spirited. Perhaps nine women in ten might turn from and despise a lover who had deserted, and deceived them : but Marion Douglas was not one of those nine women ; she was rather the tenth, who would stand up with outstretched arms, ready to welcome and pardon. How great in her power of forbearance, her wealth of love, was the girl Osborne had cast away from him, when compared with the falseness of Helen Douglas.

Helen was as ready to snare him, and leave him, or to snare him and marry him, according to the course events took between her and Archie Douglas. Marion was ready to take him back again, and cling to him in spite of deception and desertion. To pity, to forgive, only let him come back to her and try her, and he would see how black a sin

that strong love of her's would wipe out. But he would not come back, although her heart cried for him, from its very depths.

He had fled away from Stedleigh because he could not love her, and she should never see him again. The curtain had fallen between them, and no effort of hers could draw it up. She was helpless, hopeless; who could comfort her in the loss of that love which had been her rock and her fortress? He had gone away from her, and she did not know where he might be; she only knew he was not with her, and would never be with her more. She crept closer to Mrs. Douglas, as if seeking shelter from the cruel agony, while the words still rang in her ears, shutting out all hope—"never again!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

## UNEXPECTED NEWS.

WE expect blows from our enemies ; we receive them, as a matter of course, when they come, and return them, too, sometimes, if occasion offers, although this last is more according to the natural man than the Christian. But a blow from a friend is both bitter and unlooked for. It is not pleasant to be smitten on the cheek, yet, when the smiter is our cherished friend, how much more difficult of endurance.

Frederick Osborne sneered at friendship often, and sneered at love. Archie, with the world untried before him, had not been dis-

posed to believe in its falseness ; but now, as he sat in the hotel in Jermyn Street, reading a letter from his father, he felt inclined to adopt Osborn's view of human nature. How much of baseness and treachery did those lines from Mr. Douglas convey ; of baseness and treachery too, in a quarter where it was least looked for.

Harry Osborne had been Archie's friend of many years standing, his one only friend from boyhood to manhood, and then his sister's lover ; now he was neither. In a moment both those ties had been snapped, Harry's own hand had cut away the roots of that love and friendship. Archie could never think of him again as he had thought of him once, thought of him only a moment ago, before he broke the seal of that letter. How could he look round the world now, and say who was true and who was false ? This was his first step in the road of experience, an experience that teaches us the world's wisdom, by which we generally learn to doubt and distrust.

In fact the world's wisdom is made up of



doubt and distrust. It is wisdom that seeks to save us from the hands of our friends as well as from the hands of our enemies ; and Archie Douglas was learning it now. With the precipitancy of all young minds, he was running from the extreme of belief to the extreme of disbelief.

Harry's friendship for him had been all a sham and a pretence, his love for Marion had been cruel, but a pretence too. Frederick Osborne's remark about women paying their own mess, came back to him, as the explanation of Harry's conduct. He had loved Stedleigh, and not Marion ; consequently, when a cause arose to lead him to part from her, he had done so without pain, or remorse.

We who know Harry so well, know too, how unjust this was ; he was weak and vacillating, he had not loved Marion much, perhaps ; but he had loved her, or thought he loved her, until a stronger light extinguished the lesser. He had fought against his longings, and then succumbed : he had deceived, and cruelly deserted Marion.

Archie saw the cruelty and the desertion,

but he did not see the struggle. He judged as men are apt to judge, who can only see the sin but not the heart of the sinner. The crime stands out in flaming letters, so that those who run may read; but the fight and the enticement, the temptation and the recoil, and the temptation again, are hidden from us. Man only sees the broad fact, the thing which is done, and stamps with the heel of execration, and goes his way well satisfied that his voice has been raised in condemnation, and that he, like the Pharisee of old, is not as other men are.

Archie sat with his elbow on the table before his untasted breakfast, with his father's letter open before him, one from his mother, lying near it, with the seal still unbroken. He was disappointed and angry, very angry, and like most angry men, he was thinking wicked things. He was thinking what satisfaction it would be if he could catch Harry Osborne, and lay vengeful hands upon him: hands that should at least give pain of body, in return for the pain of mind he had caused his sister.

Mr. Douglas had desired him to come back

to Stedleigh, he wished to see him about this unfortunate affair, and about other matters. But he would not go back to Stedleigh until he made an effort to discover Harry's whereabouts : he was slinking round London somewhere ; Frederick Osborne would know where ; he must go to Frederick. He poured out a cup of half cold coffee, and read over his father's letter again, while he drank it, and eat some toast.

It was a short letter, and entered into the subject at once, without circumlocution ; so that he had got possession of the fact it conveyed before the close of the first three lines. As regarded Harry's conduct, Mr. Douglas was concise and severe, but not more severe than it deserved.

"The excuse he pleads deepens the offence," he said ; "he loves another woman. For my part I despise a man who does not know his own mind, and I heartily despise Osborne."

Archie paused over the words, "he loves another woman." His father had not said who the woman was, but with this much of a

clue in his hands he had no difficulty in filling in the name of Helen Douglas. Had Helen behaved fairly in the transaction? that was the question. He more than half doubted it sometime; he had observed an inclination in her at Stedleigh to talk to Harry. At one moment she would appear to encourage him, when he left Marion to walk with her. Again, at another, she would scarcely seem to see him at her side.

Little things Archie had thought of no consequence at the moment, came back to him now; things that he had remarked and forgotten. He remembered speaking to Marion about the cool way Helen took Harry off, the day before she left Stedleigh, and Marion had laughed at it as nonsense: and he remembered, too, the scene one evening about the song.

All those capricious indulgences, had nursed and fostered Harry's folly. They did not excuse him, but they brought her in as a partner in his wrong doing. He would talk seriously to Helen about this, after he had seen Frederick Osborne.

When they met the day following Harry's visit, they had been speaking of him, Archie expressed his surprise that he had never made his appearance again at the hotel, but Helen said nothing to throw light on his absence; she merely mentioned his visit to York Place, and his anxiety to see Mr. Douglas, suggesting the probability of his having returned to Stedleigh immediately, instead of going back to Jermyn Street. She never dropped one word that could lead Archie to think anything special had passed between her and Harry, and Archie never for a moment dreamt of such a thing, until his father's letter, telling of Osborne's treachery, put the notion in his head.

Had Helen acted fairly? Had she told him the whole truth? Did she really believe that Harry had gone home, as she said she did? were questions Archie debated while he drank his coffee.

He took up his mother's letter and opened it. It would probably be more diffuse, and throw light on much that his father left in darkness. He would see about that other

woman alluded to by Mr. Douglas : he would know of a surety if it were Helen, and probably learn something about her interview with Marion's lover. Mrs. Douglas's letter satisfied him on all these points. She blamed Harry for his conduct to Marion, and blamed him severely ; but she said he had fallen into bad hands, when he fell into those of Helen Douglas. He had the excuse of weakness, and unsteadiness of purpose. Helen had no such excuse ; she was neither weak nor purposeless, but she was very unprincipled : her acts from first to last had been a breach of hospitality, to say the least of them. Harry had admitted to his cousin that he had spoken to Helen of his love for her, and that she had desired him to return to Stedleigh : that looked very well, but in Mrs. Douglas's opinion it was all nonsense ; the command had not been strongly issued, seeing it was not obeyed. She had doubted Helen all throughout, and she doubted her still.

She was far harder on her, than on Harry, which was not to be wondered at : she had liked Harry once, and she had known him

on the day of his birth, but she had never  
ed Helen. She looked upon him rather  
the bird caught in the toils spread by  
cunning hand. If Helen had not spread  
em at first, she had spread them at last,  
nd Mrs. Douglas argued that if she had  
riven to show coldness towards him, to  
oint out the right road, instead of leading  
im along on the wrong, this sorrow and blight  
might have been spared to Marion.

They all wished to have Archie back at  
Stedleigh, and her letter wound up with a  
request for his speedy return. Marion had  
been prostrated by the intelligence regarding  
Harry, but she was better now, and most  
anxious to see him.

Two or three lines in Marion's own hand,  
ran across Mrs. Douglas's letter:—

“Archie, dear,” she said; “Mamma has  
told you everything. It was hard to bear  
at first, but I am trying to bear it now. Do  
come down to us, and don't, I beg of you,  
act in hasty anger against anyone, until we  
meet.”

She did not say who she meant. Was it

Harry, or Helen, or both ? Let her say what she would, he would speak to Helen, and that pretty plainly, too, if he found she would not give an open account of her share in the transaction ; and as for Harry—if he only met with him ! and he pushed away his cup, and clenched his hand menacingly.

Archie thrust the letters into his pocket, and prepared for his visit to Frederick Osborne. Frederick probably knew more of the real facts of the case than anyone else, and he likely knew, too, where Harry was skulking about London. He would have him skulking about London ! He had been to Frederick's chambers before he went to York Place, the morning after Harry's extraordinary visit to the hotel, but he had not been able to see him ; and when he called the next day, he heard he was out of town. He had heard from his mother that Frederick had been the bearer of his cousin's message to The Cliff, from whence had arisen all this untoward business.

He now judged rightly, that that journey having answered its end, he should find him



once more in Chancery Lane, where he might have found him the day before, if he had not been otherwise, and very foolishly engaged.

It was early when he reached Osborne's chambers, and hearing he was at home from the old woman who admitted him, he ran up stairs at once, and opening the sitting-room door sharply and suddenly, entered the room.

The breakfast cloth was spread, and the room redolent of coffee and broiled ham. Osborne himself was sitting at the corner of the table, making notes in a memorandum book, and a young barrister, whom Douglas had met with Frederick before, was balancing a spoon on the top of a cup of hot, strong tea. The sudden opening of the door made Osborne look up, and the young barrister turn his head at the same moment. A glance at Archie's face told the former that the news he had carried to Stedleigh had come up again.

"You are early astir, Douglas. Will you have some breakfast?" Osborne said, as coolly

as if he had not noticed that Archie's countenance portended a storm.

"No, thank you, I breakfasted half an hour ago. You are late this morning;" and Archie shook hands with Frederick and his friend, who ceased balancing the spoon the moment Douglas made his appearance.

"I was at a racketty dinner party yesterday, and had to begin the morning with soda-water," Osborne said; "but there! put those things off that chair, and bring yourself to an anchor."

"Never mind the things, I won't sit down," Archie answered, leaning against the side of the fire-place, with his hands in his pockets.

"Who had you at the dinner party, Fred?" the young barrister asked.

"Graham, and Close, and three or four others. We had a drag, and drove out to Richmond. Close was as drunk as a lord coming home, and blew the French horn all along the road. You'd have enjoyed it, Pounce!"

"Enjoyed which? Close's drunkenness, or the French horn?" Mr. Pounce asked, conveying his joke to Archie by a side look.

"That's not bad," Osborne said, laughing, while Archie's gravity was undisturbed. He was thinking of Harry Osborne, and Marion, and wishing for an opportunity to speak to Frederick.

"I should think not," Pounce answered, proud of his poor wit, and letting his cynical companion see his weakness. "I had something else to do than to go to Richmond, though. I was up till three o'clock at an article on stone quarries."

"What the mischief do you know about stone quarries, cockney as you are, Pounce?"

"As much as other fellows that pretend to know things they don't know. I crammed for it; and I wanted the five guineas."

"Where were you yesterday, Douglas?" Osborne asked, taking no notice of Mr. Pounce's defence of himself.

"I went down to Greenwich with Acton."

"With Acton! humph! You were playing billiards, I suppose?"

"Not at Greenwich; but we had a game or two at night, when we came back."

"You did not win I dare say," Pounce suggested.

"No, I am not lucky at games of skill. I lost fifty pounds."

"A nice little God-send for Acton," Osborne said, giving a side glance at Pounce, which conveyed a world of information to that graceless scamp, and said plainly, Acton fleeced him. Yet Acton was one of Osborne's own introductions to Archie.

"Acton is a first rate player, he is a man it does not do to touch a cue with, unless you know what you are about," he said aloud.

"It seemed all fair and honest," Archie replied. "But I was certainly no match for him."

"My dear fellow, of course it was fair, who dreams of anything else? but you must pit skill of a certain kind against skill of a certain kind, or you will come off the loser," and Osborne darted another glance at his opposite neighbour.

Yet Pounce could not go to Acton, and

say Frederick had spoken an unhandsome word of him.

"It's a serious loss, fifty pounds is no joke," Pounce said, wondering how long it was since he had had such a sum in his possession.

"I don't care a fig about it. I am not troubling myself with such things at present," Archie answered quarrelling with the condolence.

Pounce mentally envied him, while Osborne who knew more, knew he was troubled about something else.

"It's horridly hot, is it not?" Frederick said presently, putting up his memorandum book, which still lay on the table. "I must be thinking of going to Court, and I expect to be stewed."

"I want to speak to you before you go," Archie said. Pounce took the hint, and walked off, leaving the two young men alone.

"I'll see you at court Osborne," he said as he went out, and shut the door.

"You have something to tell me Archie," Osborne said rising, and standing by the fire-

place opposite Douglas, as soon as Pounce left the room.

"I have nothing to tell, except what you know already. But I have a question to ask you," Archie said in quick sharp tones, "Where is Harry Osborne?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"That's no matter. Where is he?"

"But it is a matter; you want to go and make a row out of a thing that had best be let drop quietly."

"I'll not let it drop, nor do I believe you would in my place. Have you a sister Osborne?"

"Yes, two, the more's the pity, seeing they require portions," Frederick answered, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Suppose a fellow like your cousin, played the rascal in your house as he has done in our's, would you let him slip through without a word?"

"Pooh, Archie my boy, what I might do is beside the question. It is probable I would bear it philosophically; people only add to trouble when they make a fuss, and

give men and women more to talk about."

"Then you won't give Harry's address."

"Certainly not, your father would not wish me to give it. He is gone now, and let him go. If you met him you would only do something in the heat of anger you might be sorry for."

"He is a confounded sneaking rascal, skulking and hiding round London, afraid to look me in the face; and you may tell him I said so."

"I'll tell him nothing of the kind. I hold pretty much the same opinion of him as you do. And I think him a great fool into the bargain. But this much you are wrong in, he is not skulking about London, as you call it."

"On your honour, is he not?"

"On my honour, he is not; will that satisfy you? Be wise and just, Archie. Harry will see his folly and its effects some day, a man's folly is sure to come home to him."

"Folly and villainy," Archie said, angrily. "He has been a fool and a traitor. A traitor that had not the pluck to avow his treason himself, but made you the medium of conveying it. How long has he been hatching this?"

"To do him justice, I don't believe he hatched it at all; he acted on the spur of a sudden impulse, when he found himself alone with Miss Douglas."

"I have a question to ask you about that too, Osborne. What did Helen say to him?"

"He did not enter much into it. He seemed shy of my questioning of him on it, but he told so far, that she desired him to go back to Stedleigh and fulfil his promise to your sister."

"Do you think she said it seriously?"

"It is a difficult question that Douglas. Harry thinks she did, but it is devilish hard to fathom a woman," and Frederick stooped to put on his boots.

"My mother doubts her, and I doubt her. There were one or two things at Stedleigh I



did not exactly like, however, she might have been flattered and pleased at Osborne's admiration, without supposing it would go further."

"Not knowing all the circumstances I can't pretend to judge Douglas, but they seem suspicious."

"I'll go to York Place, at any rate, and hear what she says about it. I shall be better able to come to a conclusion, after I have seen her."

"Yes, and if I were you, I'd go prepared to believe everything she says, a lady never tells a lie in love affairs or anything else. It's a capital plan to take the accused on his own account of himself. It's a pity we can't introduce it into criminal courts, the country would not have half the number of prisoners to support, which it has now."

"Nonsense, Osborne, I don't want jibeing to-day."

"Of course you don't, and you won't have any of it from Miss Douglas. She will be smoothness, and softness itself. Guilty or

not guilty, it will be all one, she will stroke you down in five minutes."

"I am not so easily stroked down as you think. I will give her blame when I am sure blame is due, but that does not take it off Harry; he has acted a rascally part, no matter who helped him."

"True, and I would have gladly washed my hands of the affair only on my uncle's account. I did not like the old man being shocked by the suddenness of a letter. You don't throw a grain of blame on me, do you?"

"Surely} not, my mother explained all that to me, and I think you did right. The only thing is, you should have come to me before you left London, or at least yesterday, after you came back."

"Where was the use of it? you would hear it soon enough, I waited for you to come to me when you did hear it. It would be against my rule to meet trouble half way, by going to look for it. But by Jove it's eleven o'clock. I must go Archie."

"You'll not go until you give me Osborne's address."

"Don't be angry with me Douglas. I cannot give it to you. I am pledged both to his father, and yours, not to give it, and besides I tell you it is better for your sister not to make a fuss; the thing is bad as it is, where is the use in adding to it?" Osborne was looking about for his hat.

"Did Harry desire you to conceal his whereabouts?"

"He did not, I don't believe he ever thought of it. He is not such a coward as that."

"I don't know; he acted a cowardly part by Marion. But let him take care, he had best not set foot in Stedleigh. I'll make him sorry for it if he comes within reach of my arm."

"You need not fear that. The Admiral won't receive him at the Cliff. He is very angry, I never saw him so angry." Osborne had found his hat, and they left the house together.

"If any one else had done it, I would not have been so surprised," Archie said return-

ing to the charge, as they went down Chancery Lane arm in arm.

"Put not your faith in princes, nor in any child of man," Frederick answered. "He was a wise old fellow that left that saying on record."

"It's deuced hard to be deceived in a friend you had faith in. I'll have no friends again, they are dangerous beasts, given to bite. But you must give me the address. I tell you I can't rest until I have had it out with him."

"Do you think I am mad, man a-live, or so little your friend as to indulge you, even if I were disposed to break my word."

They stood by a cab Osborne had hailed at the corner of the street, to take him to Westminster.

"Then you won't give it," Archie said.

"I tell you no, again. I cannot give it."

"I'll get it without you then. It is more than likely he has been writing some of his cursed nonsense to Helen, and if he has I'll get it from her."

“Very well, I have nothing to say to that,” Osborne answered, stepping into the cab. “If she chooses to make a mess of it she can,” he thought, as he drove along; “it’s no business of mine.”

END OF VOL. II.

